

Changing Allegiance

by Endeavorer

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Summary: The world is mad. Men can be cursed to become dragons and dragons can dawn the shapes of men. Hiccup did not want to be a Night Fury, but that problem seems to run in the family. Toothless found himself a new life as a mostly ordinary human boy, yet he can't completely leave behind his old one. Both must tread careful though, because betrayal lurks nearby.

1. Chapter 1

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****This story is a sequel to my previous work, Becoming the Enemy. Whether or not you read it, I hope you will enjoy this work. If you read the earlier story, this work will eventually answer dozens of the many mysteries I have left with you with last , Read and Review. ****

****Enjoy.****

* * *

><p>If any of my ancestors were to see Berk now, they would have strapped themselves to a ship's mast for fear they had gone mad. They would be utterly surprised to see the sight of Nightmares using their strength to lift heavy objects; of Gronckles taking advantage of their ability to hover to decorate roofs; or even of Nadders diving into the water to fish into nets. It would have been utter madness and insanity in their eyes; one simply does not allow their enemies to come live with them, it was foolish to trust creatures like them. Yet, now Berk did.<p>

Now, there were dragons in the village, living in houses, sleeping in beds. This was the results of the events that happened two weeks prior. Who would have ever thought that _I, _of all people, would

convince Dad to actually reconsider the whole "Kill on Sight" rule that we both lived under for practically our whole lives.

Perhaps the one thing that would have surprised them even more was me. I think they would have laughed at the idea of me being one of their descendents; given who my parents were, it does seem somewhat surprising that I didn't, oh, I don't know, inherit the ability to smash a boulder with my bare forehead. Oh well, at least I can still lift a hammer enough to slowly beat metal into a desired shape, practically one of the few things I had a real knack for aside from flying, but I can't do that until a certain Night Fury stopped by.

I picked up a small chunk of silver with a pair of tongs and placed it into the furnace, still burning despite being used plenty of times today. Silver was an interesting metal. It was slightly heavier than iron, but it was much more easily reshaped, partly because of its lower melting temperature. Once it was hot enough, I could easily break it off into chunks and shape those chunks in any manner of my choosing. All I really had to do was just sit in Gobber's forge while I waited for the metal to heat up. Such a shame he wasn't here, but I guess as his apprentice, I was trusted to work safely.

While I waited, the sound of heavy footsteps approached me. Before I could turn and look, I felt a large, meaty hand fall upon my shoulder. "What is this?" said the man, curiously. I twisted my head around, learning who he was. Stoick the Vast was my father and Chief of the Hairy Hooligan Tribe. People tell me that when he was a baby, he popped a dragon's head clean off his shoulders. Do I believe it? Yes, I do. "Does this have to do with all that silver you wanted me to get for you yesterday?"

"Oh, uh, yeah, it's a part of our project you wanted me to do," I replied. One of the consequences of the past few weeks' events was that I was tasked with dealing with Berk's whole 'dragon' situation. It was stressful and made little progress so far, but at least I was not sitting around being 'Useless'. I took his attention to one of the nearby tables. A dozen silver arrowheads were laid out on top, ready to receive wooden shafts to complete them. I had prepared them earlier today, but I decided that since I had plenty of spare time to work with, I figured it would have been a good idea to make more of them.

"So arrows?" my father asked, skeptical.

"Arrows," I replied.

"I don't see how this helps us," he stated. "Sure, silver looks nice, but it's not very practical for any edges. The metal is too soft and tarnishes too easily to make use of it."

"They're not for killing, Dad," I replied flatly. "They're for the dragons."

"Oh, and here I thought they were on our side." He laughed. "You could just use blunts if you wanted to stun dragons; you wouldn't need to spend a small fortune for every time you wanted to refill your quiver."

Now, I just realized, he was messing with me by pretending not to

really know. I felt so idiotic for having fallen victim to that ploy. I guess he must have been feeling good about something, since he apparently felt this was the right time to use his sense of humor. "Dad," I said in a dull tone. "Now's not the timeâ€¦ I've got work to do." I turned my attention back to the silver ingot in the furnace, it did not appear like it was time to cut it up into pieces. Maybe a minute moreâ€¦ I picked up a pair of tongs, getting ready to work the metal as soon as the time was right.

For some reason, it seemed that all my actions and words did was cause my father's face to grow a grin. He approached me. "It's good to see you working so hard on this," he commented. He muttered something unintelligible to himself before he approached me again. "I wasâ€¦ wrong, my son," he said.

"Uh, what?" I said, breaking my attention from the furnace once more. What was he talking about?

"A few weeks ago, our laws required us to kill dragons on sight. They were wild animals in our eyes, to be driven out or wiped out as was convenient for us. It was iron clad, part of our way of life. Yet these past few months have brought nothing but endless, impossible challenges to laws that had been held firm for generationsâ€¦. most especially, you."

"Dad?" I questioned, looking him in the eyes, dazed and asking for questions. Why was he bringing this up now?

"Toothless," said my father, putting his meaty hands on my shoulders. "I am proud to have you as my son, don't forget it."

I dropped what I was holding, the metal clanged onto the ground with a heavy thump. Iâ€¦ never expected this. Not from him, especially not after the things I told you. "Uhâ€¦" I stuttered, I was just stunned, unable to think of any way to respond in a way that resembled an actual language. I stood there for what must have been an eternity before the sound of heavy wing beats and the shouts of my master overhead drew my attention.

"Stoick!" cried Gobber as he approach, riding a certain Night Fury. The blonde haired man had a variety of bags strapped to his arm, each bursting with a variety of assorted things, most notably a huge bundle of leather rolled up on the dragon's back, possibly made from the hides of several yaks. The dragon, likewise, was equipped with a variety of backs filled to the brim with a variety of assorted things. Last I checked, I knew the two of them went around town shopping, but I didn't know what that was for. "Fancy seeing you here. Didn't think you'd have the spare time after trying to solve that whole marriage issue."

I could see my father smirk a little as they approached. "Ah, so that's where they went. They must have went shopping." he muttered to me before turning to our new arrivals. "Oh, yeah, well, Hildegard's fiancÃ© did not die in that big fight last week and there's the whole dispute about hisâ€¦ eligibility because of well, you know. But I think they'll wait for a few more months till my boys can fix that mess for them, so I got out of that much earlier than I thought I would. And then it turned out I had some time before I some time to spend before I dealt with the new fishing boatsâ€¦"

I swallowed my throat. Great, now I had an entire marriage resting upon my shoulders. As if I needed more things to worry other than a good chunk of Berk counting on me.

The dragon landed in front of the store, allowing Gobber to disembark. The dragon turned his attention to me, aware of my own worry. Just how was I supposed to help someone's marriage? "Oh, don't worry about," said the Night Fury. "I ended up disfiguring him, her."

"Er, what?" I said. Without any context that could mean anything.

"Well, I ended up hitting her face and then suddenly people wanted to marry her even though most everyone thought she was a guy." I blinked. Did he really disfigure someone so badly, that he turned a man into a woman? Because that's really what it sounded like. I don't even want to know how that was possible. "Anyways, I'm sure if we try and fail hard enough we could end up turning her into a dragon and solving that whole marriage issue for her again."

My father approached the black dragon, his heavy hand reaching upwards and gently rubbing the dragon's forehead. There was a smile on his face, both filled with equal parts regret and joy. "I can still only imagine what you have to tell me, boy," he sighed. "Oh, Hiccup, how did things ever turn out like this?"

"Oh, nothing really all that bizarre, Dad," replied the dragon, even though it was completely unintelligible for most people. Unlike me, Gobber and my father did not understand the language dragons spoke; I did, because I used to be a dragon. "I just ended up fooling around in some sorcery, just because I thought it would be nice to be able to lift a sword properly, and then suddenly everyone in the whole archipelago starts having a way to change shape. Really, I'm kind of surprised it took us this long to notice some of it." Hiccup was my older brother, both of us shared both parents with our only difference being that I was born and raised as a dragon because Mother was pregnant with me when she ended up getting cursed. To make a long story short, Hiccup broke the spell that made me a dragon, turned himself into a Night Fury, and I ended up learning about our relation only after Mother kidnapped my brother. On thinking about it, that situation still sounds convoluted.

Some things though, bypassed language entirely. Father simply smiled, as if those words came perfectly crystal clear on his end. "Well, I think I'll leave you all to your duties; those new houses need approval from someone." And then, just like that, he was gone, giving us barely enough time to say our goodbyes.

"Right, and I think I'll get to work on this project you want, since, well, you don't have hands." said Gobber as he patted the large bundle of leather over his shoulders. Despite his home being primarily for metal working, there were a couple of places where other crafts could be worked on. The owner and proprietor of the store walked off to one of the work benches and picked out a variety of assorted tools, some of which seemed experimental.

"What is that about?" I said to the Night Fury.

"You'll see, bud," said the Night Fury.

I sighed. I had no idea what my brother possibly could possibly want with it, but he must have had an idea, he never seemed to run out of them. It must have been a human thing or something, I mean, what possibly use could anyone have for all of that leather."Someday, you'll tell me," I promised him. I picked up my pair of tongs and lifted the silvery metal out of the forge and onto a nearby anvil. It wasn't it there too long, so it wasn't liquefied or anything.

"Oh, you can be sure of that," my brother said. "I think you'd enjoy itâ€|"

"Well, are you going to give me a hand or what?"

"I don't have any hands anymore," said the dragon.

"Right, because you are a useless reptile," I replied, appropriating an insult he gave me back when we first met. It was practically my default since I had a hard time with coming up with new ones.

"Takes one to know one," he responded as he began stacking and organizing the assorted bags of supplies in a neat pile on a table. Hopefully they had some of the things we needed."Besides, it's much better than being an eighty pound toothpick." It was strange how we liked to banter back and forth against each other. Neither of us really meant itâ€| most of the time, probably because whenever we thought of something, it usually applied to use both. Still, we had fun. Suddenly, I began to understand why all of the other younglings often did some play fighting when I was growing up, it was justâ€| fun.

"And I'm sure you'd make a good main course for some bear or something." I replied, pinching my nose to feign. "You've eaten so much fish that you practically smell like one." Placing the metal onto an anvil, I grabbed a chisel from a nearby rack and started breaking the metal bar piece by piece. After each piece weighted little more than an ounce or two, I started shaping the metal, grinding and hammering the silvery chunks until their tips narrowed. This partâ€| took forever, but at least I had something to distract me while doing this incredibly monotonous task. How _anyone_ did this without going mad was beyond me.

"And neatly, too," replied my brother. "You still have the worst table manners I have ever seen. You pretty much gobble everything in front of you." He actually used up a few words that didn't really exist in the dragon language, after all, we did not have a concept of 'table manners' on the count of lacking tablesâ€|We did have an overabundance of manners, though. One of the things that a few of us have been working on is trying to expand the collection of words in the dragon language, using partially made up combinations of phrases and sounds, mostly to avoid the issue of not having the right words to describe something. Really, fascinating the kind of work Fishlegs and Meatlug did thereâ€|

"I'd argue since most Vikings do that anyways, I'm the one who's actually eating properly. You're the one with bad table manners, by deciding to take fifteen minutes chewing a peas," I said with a smug grin on my face. On the rare occasion we did have something unique to us, we blew it up to such proportions, that it even if was true, it was _not that true_. Still, he couldn't possibly top that. I had

him.

Hiccup gave the closest imitation of a smirk he could manage with his jaws. "Oh, you think you're really clever, don't you, bud?" Now, I was getting worried, what could he possibly have up his nonexistent sleeves? "Well, I guess you won this round," he said.

I smirked in response. The score was four to five, maybe I can win the next one to tie him up tomorrow. "Well, I guess your manners, aren't that bad," I said, giving a sort of humility to my victory. Nothing was worse than a sore winner, right?

"Maybe," he replied as he continued organizing assorted bags. "Though, you might want to double check your arrowsâ€¦"

Confused, I turned my gaze down towards the little hunks of metal that I had finely crafted. They were pretty much done and all I needed to do was inscribe them properly to have them ready for today's test. I narrowed my gaze, still wondering what he was talking about. They were perfectly fine, as far as I could tellâ€¦ except they were not. I slapped myself across the face when I had realized I had the arrow heads pointed in the opposite direction; the little sockets where the shafts had to be driven through to complete the arrow were on the tip of the arrowheads. All of that work, wasted, but that was not the worst of it.

I quietly scowled at my older brother, who was clearly ignoring me as he continued with his work, or at least pretending to. He let me have that one, just when he knew he had an easy, possible game ending reply and he choose not the use itâ€¦ somehow, I think that upset me more than having to redo those arrowheads. The score was really three to six, just when I thought I was getting the hang of it. I so owe him for that oneâ€¦

Sighing, I heated the arrowheads up again enough to correct my mistake and finish inscribing a symbols on their heads. Next, I took some premade wooden shafts from a nearby collection and slotted them in, completing each arrow without wasting another few minutes. All told, there were a dozen. "Alright, I'm done with them," I said to my brother.

This time, he responded, now that I was not as upset about my loss, I guess he thought it was safe to interact with me againâ€¦ "Great, so, we're ready for the new test, then?" Hiccup asked. "Maybe it'll work this timeâ€¦"

"I hope, I mean, because if it does notâ€¦ I just don't know what to do with myself."

"Don't worry, about it, bud. We still have some options open to us," said my brother.

I nodded. I took a small quiver and about six of the arrows with me. I did not really need to shoot them or anything andâ€¦ I don't think anyone, Viking or Dragon, liked being shot at; it was simply bad for your health. "So, where to?" I asked my brother.

"Same place as last time," he told me.

I nodded as I climbed onto my larger brother's neck. Besides, I did

not have any wings, so I guess it's not as bad. "Well, let's get going," I said and Hiccup took off.

Hiccup was good at flying, no thanks to me. Like Mother and myself, Hiccup was fast and able to quickly change direction and orientation in the air in a moment's notice, so I was not afraid of falling or anything. These days, I've gotten used to the idea that I had gotten used to flying on my older brother. Before, I would have complained about how I was too old to really fly on anyone else's back; no one except the youngest of hatchlings clung to their elder's backs, like how human infants needed to be carried before they could walk on their own. It was just embarrassing otherwise, like admitting I was so helpless that I needed the help. But, eventually, I realized that if I wanted to get to certain places, and quickly, flying was the fastest means of transport available to me. Besides, it's probably not as embarrassing if I lacked the power to fly myselfâ€¦

We flew over a number of houses, a few dragons were beneath us, all of them seamlessly moving through the crowd. The unfortunate truth was that all but a few of them were really dragons, practically all of them were human before. Berk suffered an affliction of some sort, a curse cast by Alvin the Treacherous that resulted in dozens of warriors completely transforming into dragons. As a result, we have been working for the past two weeks trying to break that spell... I think we were just as glad our father still only had a few rough patches of scale instead of having to worry about growing claws, for the time being at least.

And that was not the only dragon related transformation problem we had; my brother and a few of my friends drank a potion that granted them tremendous strength and durability, but slowly converted them into dragons everytime they so much as took a scratchâ€¦ I guess it was offset by the fact that I had some friends, who unlike me, were really dragons, but by the use of amulets disguised themselves in human form. And they were in complete control of that, so they weren't a problemâ€¦

Eventually, we arrived at our destination, a small house near the docks. The windows were in shattered outward and door had several gaping holes, including where the door knob was supposed to be. We both knew this was one of the worst off of Alvin's victims and quite frankly, it was a little dangerous to be around him. Still, I don't think either of us were all that concerned.

I got off my brother once we landed and made our final approach.

"Should we knock?" I asked. After all, it was the right and polite thing to do.

"Uh, go ahead, I think I might break the door by accidentâ€¦" said my brother, a rare statement coming from him.

I nodded and gently tapped the door, unsure of how to really approach it.

The door's broke off of its hinges and nearly fell on to me before I nearly dodged it in time. Unfortunatelky, I was not the cause of the door breaking. The house rattled and glass broke. Every fiber of my being shook as a powerful and invisible force moved through my very

bones. "COME IN!" we heard. After a moment, with the initiation given, I struggled to approach. Unfortunately, the house's sole resident spoke again, bringing me to my knees. "OH, SORRY!"

After the wind was knocked out of me, just like that. Hiccup, probably because he was bigger or hardier pushed me to my feet as I struggled to get myself up. "You can try to destroy us after we're done, not before.

"SOR-" The voice started, but cut himself off before I went onto my knees again.

"Thank you, for not killing us," said my brother. I silently nodded in agreement.

I shook my head, mostly to get the disorientation out of my system. "Let's get this overwith," I muttered as I walked inside, Hiccup pushing me from behind in case I fell again.

The inside of the house looked even worse than the outside, with assorted furniture and knickknacks scattered on the floor in a disorganized heap. Among the largest of these heaps was a creature that resembled something like a giant purplish manta ray with short, stringy legs. It was huge, much larger than my brother yet far more sturdy looking.

Roland was a dockworker. According to the testimony of people that knew him, he had been working in the harbor since he was twelve winters of age. He was considered an average warrior, capable of using a hammer with lethal efficiency and had a pretty solid defense. He was also somewhat good at sailing and once placed high in an annual fishing tournament. He lived alone, though was somewhat active in the community despite not taking a mate. All in all, a mostly typical Viking.

What was not typical was the fact he was now a Thunderdrum; the fact that I considered being any other kind of dragon being 'typical' says volumes about me. He was the only one on Berk as far as I knew and my familiarity with Tidal dragons was sketchy at best. Now, even though I grew up as a dragon, I never really spent much time around a Thunderdrum before. Out of all of the dragons we could have picked to run our tests on, we picked the only one that did not involve any fire whatsoever, mostly because Roland was one of the worst off, since he hadâ€¦ issues. Roland did not have full control of his ability to project his voiceâ€¦ as a result, he often ended up causing some damage every time he so much as spoke something, anything. He lived alone, so he had no one to take care of him. It was not a big issue since his new form allowed him to fish quite effectively, but it did cause panic on more than one occasion when some fishermen thought he was a wild dragon approaching the village and his house was falling apart because few people wanted to get near him.

Other than that, he was good. He complied with our request, and kept silent over just what our current idea of 'treatment' consisted of. He, like a lot of other people took it for granted when I was able to understand him on the rare instances he was able to speak without sending me to the floor. Most of the adults, except for Father and Gobber, did not know about myâ€¦ history or of my origins. While it was true I was the Chief's son, most people did not have to know I

was a dragon. I was more less able to convince everyone that I just had special powersâ€| which was more or less true to begin with.

"Alright, are you ready, Roland?" I asked.

The Thunderdrum nodded, thankfully keeping silent. Hiccup picked up the door with his front paws and began reattaching it.

I took one of the arrows in my quiver and strike the Thunderdrum's chests. Now, despite the fact that that the arrows was made of purely mundane materials, when Hiccup and I prepared them in a special way and inscribed with a specific rune, unintelligible to the two of us, the arrows gained the power to... interact with other spells or enchantments, often breaking whatever hold a spell had over someone. There was a certain irony to me making them, mostly because they were the reason I found out I was not a dragon.

The Thunderdrum became surrounded by a strange green blaze that consumed and his body. His arms and legs gained a sort of thickness to them, becoming longer and bulkier by the moment. Purple scale softened and peeled away, revealing pinkish skin that was equally as hard and rugged. Hair grew, most of it concentrated on his chin and on the top of his head. In a moment, the flames dissipated, leaving a slightly stunned, but seemingly wholly human man.

Roland began using his hands to feel around his face, even stroking his unkempt beard as if he was noticing it for the first time. Hiccup immediately draped a robe over the new man, concealing parts that should not be seen. "Is it really over!?" he said with glee, finally not shattering my bones with his voice. "Am I really going to stay like this?"

"We don't know," I said.

"Maybe this time, but if notâ€| we can always try again," supplied Hiccup. "We've got more than one arrow this time.

"Uh, right," said Roland before hunching over. "I don't think I feel so goodâ€|"

This was the unfortunate part, this not the first test we've tested on Roland. Ever since my brother and I got were assigned our task, we've tried trying to break the enchantment that kept all of Alvin's victims dragons. And for the most part, we've managed to return people to human form, but our current problem made things far more complicated.

Roland fell to the ground, a dizzy look in his face. Skin started to peel off in sheets, each being replaced by the same pearlescent scales that had been removed not a few minutes prior. Arms and legs began to lose their definitions, seemingly atrophying before my very eyes. The former man's face twisted into very clear discomfort, the sensation of change being clearly painful in comparison to what he experienced only a few minutes ago.

While my brother and I knew the arrows could restore a man's true form by disrupting the transformative curse, neither of us expected the curse to resist our attempts to break it. Whenever we tried to undo it, the effect reasserts itself within the hour. Now, Roland

paid the price for our attempt and suffered for it. The pain must have been crippling.

Roland groan in pain, looking at my brother and I to give him the right answersâ€| the sad truth was, I did not knew what to do, I had no answers. I looked my brother, wondering if there's something going through his head. He always had some half-mad scheme or idea to tryâ€| "Do you want us to try again?" he asked the downed man, a grim tone in his voice. Roland nodded.

Suddenly, I understood why he wanted me to bring a dozen arrows.

* * *

><p>Alone in skies above my home villages, I begin to understand something I failed to realize. My Dad liked to talk about having traveled every corner of Berk, about how he climbed its tallest peaks and how he crawled into the darkest depths. Now, I can finally understand.<p>

Berkâ€| has changed. Yes, some things have remained the same, like the fact we're twelve days north of Hopeless and a few degrees south of Freezing to death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery. That hasn't changed. What has, is the fact that a number of us have either turned into dragons or is in the process of eventually becoming one.

And I was one of the first.

When I picked up the black, Night Fury scaled book from Trader Johann all those months ago, I did not know what I was doing. I wanted to make myself stronger, to make myself intoâ€| someone I was not. I succeeded; I got my wish. I became stronger, completely different. And for a scrawny, clumsy, worthless boy like I was, it doesn't much different than becoming a dragon that every man, woman, and child considered one of the most dangerous creatures in all of Midgardâ€| and the greatest trophy.

All things considered, I can honestly say it's not the worst thing that's ever happened to meâ€| which must really say something about me. I might have find out that every time I've tried to take down a Night Fury, to prove that I can beâ€| something, I find out that I've been trying to kill my long lost mother who's been turned in a dragon, but at the same time, I learned I had a brother, someone who legitimately looked up to me. I might have gotten kidnapped by some merchant who turned out to be a spy for the dragons, but at the same time, I met new friends. Even though I was for all intents and purposes, a creature many regarded as a beast to be slain, Dad was still willing to accept me, to trust me; he was even willing to accept Toothless and my new friends, despite theirâ€| background.

I feel like I have gotten off easy compared to others. I was a young boy, a dependant. I might have been good at the forge, but I was still just an apprentice. I neither had a house of my own or anyone counting on me to bring home supper. Others were adults, grown men who were married and often had children of their own. While Vikings like to be self sufficient by learning plenty of different skill sets, most also dedicated their lives to studying and employing specific sets of trades.

When Alvin came to Berk, brandishing a spear that slowly painfully turned dozen men into scaled, winged creatures, he also destroyed people's lives in a painful and slow fashion. While, they were by no means the majority or the most important people on Berk or the only casualties in Alvin's attack, they still suffered a fate that was tragic as it was embarrassing. Sure, learning to fly and breathe might come easy to some of them, but with the loss of fingers and hands comes to loss of independence. Yes, I was able to learn how to use my breath to warm up a furnace, but that didn't mean I could lift a hammer and carefully shape metal, that's far more important to a professional blacksmith. The past few weeks, I've met a Scauldron bigger than the boats he used to make, a Gronckle used to be a shoe maker, and a Deadly Nadder for a tailor. None of them are not earning their livelihood.

People were so desperate, that many of them were counting on me to break their curse. Yes, I might have been in more or less the same boat as most of them wereâ€¦ but I had experience. I was the one who has been the dragon the longest and I've already been studying to undo the my transformation for a while now. As for Toothless, he showed up using a cloak that turned him back into a Night Fury, so people think he might be able to pull the same trick in reverseâ€¦. People really believe we had the answers, so much that they were willing to trust us.

Now, I justâ€¦ wanted to be worthy of that trust; I did not want to fail them.

Which is why I flew down into the Great Hall. It was dinner time and I had asked my friends to come meet with me to discuss how things were coming along. Each of us was tasked with helping the afflicted in some manner, so I made it a point for us to meet every dinner.

Some of my friends were really dragons in disguise, former peers of Toothless back when he was a Night Fury, but after the events of the past few weeks, they've more or less joined Berk. Most people think they were other people who were cured by Alvin, but given a few amulets to maintain human form and it was through this excuse we've managed to help them teach the former Vikingsâ€¦ humans, since being a Viking was an occupational choice.

The novelty of being a Night Fury has mostly worn off, so no one really paid any attention as I made my through. Quickly, I navigated myself to the usual table, one of the central ones by a firepit. All of them were already there.

Astrid might have drank the same potion I did, but she was still mostly human, with the only traces of scale she had were on her throat. She was far more careful about avoiding damage, because anyone who drank from that potion while they gained an increase in their athletic and healing ability, that healing slowly transformed the imbibers into a dragon for every injury taken. Still she couldn't speak Norse anymore and instead communicated in the same, nearly guttural growls and cries as a Nadder did. She looked at me as I approached the table. "Where's Toothless?" she asked.

"He's not coming," I replied. "Things didn't go so well, with Roland." We've done everything from repeatedly using the arrows every time the curse tried to resurge itself, hammering multiple arrows in

at the same time, and having him eat the arrows to see if that did anything. We spent the rest of the day trying to cure the Thunderdrum and nothing we tried stuck. At best, we've managed to stave the curse off for an hour before it all came back all at onceâ€¦ Still, at least Roland was fineâ€¦ if a little weary from all the changing back and forth.

"Such a shame," said a red haired girl with white silk scarf. "Though, that means one there's more hens for everyone." Stormfly may have been a Nadder and to anyone who knew that secret, it showed. Her clothes may have been gifts from Astrid and a certain, but absent Bog Burglar, but Stormfly seemed to have grown quite fascinated with wearing of clothes and putting on makeup. Every time I see her, she's well dressed and puts on a clean appearance that I think dirt might be contractually obligated to avoid her.

"So, Toothless isn't coming?" repeated Fishlegs, prompting me to nod. "â€¦ It didn't work, did it?" I nodded again. I might have spoken the language of dragons, a language which as far as I know was only understandable to anyone who has either been a dragon before or partially a dragon. He was wholly human. Fishlegs just shook his head. "That curse has like a Plus Five Resistance. I thought it would work!"

"So did we," I added. "After we were done, he just decided to go to bed earlyâ€¦" And by early, I mean before the sun even began to set. I really hope my little brother is alright. I'm used toâ€¦ failure, but he was still kind of new at it. It must have really stung him.

"Things have been some whatever hard for him, especially since One Eye's passing," Meatlug appeared as a somewhat large brunette girl sat that sat next to Fishlegs. They had a close relationship, as far as I can tell. Her name, even by Berk standards might have sounded odd, but she grown quite attached to it Interestingly enough, like Fish, Meatlug was a knowledge keeper, though she did so by memorizing songs because dragons lacked a written language.

I nodded. One Eye was the former Flight Commander and teacher of Toothless and my new friends. He died very recently and was honored the way all great warriors should have, regardless of what they were, but that hardly made up for the fact he was now gone. Toothless had mostly recovered from his loss.

"Heh, told you it wouldn't work," said Snotlout in a matter of fact tone. "You guys know a thing or two, but you aren't that good." Like, Astrid and I, my cousin was given the same potion we were. Ironically, it was meant for Toothless, but it was given to him to save his life. Unlike Astrid, Snotlout was far more reckless, often taking injuries every time he tried to pull a stunt. A result, he's gorn a pair of vicious horns and his jaw and nose fused together to form a Nightmare's snout. Now, I might be crazy, but unlike some people, I am not crazy enough to call him 'Snoutfaced Snotlout' for a reason. Especially since even though he spoke Norse, he could understand the dragon language.

"Uh, yeah, you're not all that good," said Hookfang. He was Nightmare and one of One Eye's many grandsons. In human form, I could describe him by the words: tall, dark, and handsome. Lots of girls were attracted to him for some reason, much to Snotlout's displeasure, not

that he actively wanted the attention in the first place. Still, he was my cousin's wingman.

"And I suppose Snotlout is?" I replied.

"Darn, right I am," said the partial Nightmare. He dangled a rune inscribed stone from a string. As much as I wanted to deny it, Snotlout did have a pointâ€¦ I did not know enough about sorcery to think up any clever solutions or make some sort of fancy counter curse. The only reason, Toothless and I know how to brew up a potion that turns people into dragons or make arrows that remove magic is because I picked up a book written almost haphazardly in three languages, only one of which I knew. Snotlout, like us, also learned how to make something, a runestone that warded against fires. Yet, for some reason, we were the only ones who could make something from the book. I had Fishlegs and Astrid try their luck and all that happened was I had to pay for a new kettleâ€¦ Now, I was definitely sure the world was going crazy. Snotlout having a point was practically as much as a sign of Ragnarok as much as the boat made of discarded nail clippings. "Hey, Ow!" He yelped as he grabbed his scaly cheek.

"Thanks, Astrid," I said as the shield maiden in train recoiled her fist. For a while, Astrid had pretty much sworn off punching Snotlout and myself, since each injury brought us one step closer to being dragons. She removed herself from that ban recently when I had pretty much become as dragon I was going to get. I guess she decided the same should apply to Snotlout.

"Oh, it was my pleasure," she said in a calm, vindictive tone. "I've been waiting to do that for a _long time. You _know, I think maybe you need a little moreâ€¦|_" she raised her other hand and readied for another punch.

"Hey, watch the face," yelped Snotlout as he tried to guard himself against the coming assault.

"Oh, don't worry, I'm _sure, _you'll be quite handsome with ladies when I'm through with you," said Astrid. "After all, we've got like _eight _Nightmares. What's another one?" Snotlout wisely switched seats with Hookfang, placing him out of Astrid's reach across the table. Astrid, with a gleeful smirk lowered her fists. Oh, well, I guess it's not the end of the world, some things never really change at allâ€¦|

This time, it was Ruffnut's turn to speak. "Uhâ€¦| are we eating or what? It is like, dinner time and all.."

"Yeah," added Tuffnut. "We can barely understand half the conversation already, but nothing we heard says anything about food."

"No, they have not-"

"-Said anything about food,"

Next to the twins was a dragon Zippleback. Like Toothless, Meaglug, Stormfly, and Hookfang, the Zippleback was another of One Eye's Squires. However, there were three amulets to go around and whenever Barf and Belch wanted to become human for while, they needed both two

to do it safely. More often than not, they were fine being a dragon for most of the time, mostly since it didn't seem to faze the twins at all.

"Yeah, just what I thought," said Tuffnut, as if he understood the dragon perfectly. "I want my dinner."

"You guys need to speak proper Norse. Even a dragon knows it better than you," commented Ruffnut, ignoring the fact that quite a few of us do not have human vocal cords anymore.

"We can give Hiccup a pen so he can write," suggested Fishlegs.

"Ugh, you want us to _read_?" asked Ruffnut.

"Why not murder us first? That's merciful in comparison," said Tuffnut.

"Now I think reading might be a tadâ€¦ empty, but I don't think it'sâ€¦ lethal," commented Meatlug.

"Uh, they're right," I said. That earned me a look from every one of my friends that could understand me. Yeah, they think I gone mad. Well, they're wrong; I was already plenty mad to begin with. "It is dinner time and we better eat before the food runs out. Someone, just get me a bucket or raw salmonâ€¦"

"And now, they-" started Barf.

"Bring up food," added Belch.

"Oh, good," Ruffnut stated.

"Finally! I was getting hungry," said Tuffnut. More and more, the twins continue to astound me. They understand Bard and Belch even when they're not supposed toâ€¦ yet still get lost in a conversation with other dragonsâ€¦ I am just not going to question it, it's the twins. They defy logic, classification, and sanity; it is not a smart idea to wonder how they think.

Everyone just shook their heads and began digging into their portions. I got full of tuna and ate my meal slowly, picking each and every individual piece with my paw, then biting, chewing, and swallowing it. So what if I was pretty much the only Viking or dragon to obey table manners? I'm not going to change that just because I was a something different.

Half way through, Fishlegs pushed his food away, apparently done. I think I was on my fifth fish at this point. "Hey, Meatlug, can you translate for us?"

"Uh, sure," said the brunette.

"So, what are you going to do?" asked Fishlegs. "I mean, the arrows are definitely not going to workâ€¦"

I took another bite from my half eaten trout before I replied. The answer was plainly obvious to me; in fact, maybe I should have done it weeks ago, but circumstances forced me to put it off later and

later. The fact of the matter was, I did not know enough about anything, especially not about how spells worked. I had to do something, anything to clear up the confusion, to give me the knowledge I needed to help others. And there was one place nearby, just an island over, where I knew I could do precisely that. "I am going to the Library."

* * *

><p>So, we're finally beginning again. I'm going to try to write somewhat shorter chapters but come out with a more consistent quicker update schedule. This chapter is 70% of the length of previous chapters, for reference. Only two PoVs, but each PoV is slightly longer.**

I understand that in the previous story I have established that lots of words don't exist in the dragon language, like 'books' and 'library'. Here, I am establishing that some words are beginning to be translated over to help in communication. I am going to avoid most of the specific nuisances, because that'd be crazy, but I will try to put an effort to it when it's appropriate for it.

Camicazi is not currently in this story, but I will say she'll show up later. It simply did not make sense for her to be in Berk currently.

2. Chapter 2

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This was hard to do due to housing renovations taking up more writing time than I thought, preventing me from making the leaps and bounds I had intended on. Now, I am back, though the renovations are still ongoing at this time, the majority of the disruptions are dealt with.

Also, a Special Thanks to CAN07 for providing the picture for this story and Becoming the Enemy.

* * *

><p>I was on a ship, on a voyage that I had been planning for ages. Long ago, I thought gave up adventuring, but now, I began to wonder why I bothered to stop in the first place. It was just too exciting, danger and plunder awaited me in the distance and I could not decide which I wanted more. With danger came challenges worthy of my skill and with plunder came the funds to do whatever I wished, even do more quests; both came packaged together with prestige and fame, not the main goal, but definitely a nice byproduct in my opinion. All I needed to do was pick my course.

"Captain," said one of my crew members. "It's been five days since we've seen land of any sort, are you sure we're going the right way?" The rest of the crew all muttered in hesitant agreement, less willing to be so upfront with me.

I shook my head in response. My crew did not consist weaklings or cowards, but only the foolish or insane would go off sailing without

food or drink. We were somewhere over a third of a way done with our supplies and none of us found any settlements. While we did have some nets to collect fish and some pots to collect rainwater, the chance of that working depended on how much any of the gods wanted us to continue going forward. Coupled with the fact winter was just the corner and my crew had justifiable reasons to want to head back home.

I considered it for a moment. I was not a cruel nor sadistic Captain; I understood the needs of my crew. But at the same time, I wanted to get that prize I've been looking for. I pulled out a old, faded sheet of parchment from my pack, a map that promised great riches. I just knew we were close and if I turned back now, I would never stop hating myself for my weaknessâ€| but if I turned back now, maybe I couldâ€|

No, I was not going home empty handed, not when I had something to prove. "One more day," I said, "Then we'll turn back home." The crew all nodded in compliance. I was not being fully honest with them, but I needed them.

"Captain!" shouted one of the men.

"What it is it?" I asked.

"I see land!" he shouted.

Another took his spyglass and joined in, "I see it, too!"

Astonished, I took the spyglass from one of the men, spotting a small island in the distance. I consulted my map again. Yes, this was it. "Set sail men, we've found it." Looks like I did not need to lie all that much after all.

A few hours later, we made landfall and it was not even time for lunch yet. The gods must have been favoring me more than I thoughtâ€| maybe I should be a little more pious when I got home, a sacrificial Yak or two as a thank you, at least, if this really was the right place. There was only one way to be sure. Aside from the tall, snow covered mountainous peak, the island itself was rather bland. There was little if any vegetation around, but that did not concern me.

I led my men up the mountain, following a zigzagging path of cliffs that provided an easy, if time consuming way up. We did not have to go too far before we found a dark cave, the entrance partially collapsed by heavy stones, but still big enough to easily get into.

I took a torch and went inside, my gut leading me to go forward. I slipped into the entrance, going blind before my eyes adjusted to the dim torchlight. Once they did, I dropped everything I was holding in stunned surprise. "We found it," I exclaimed, as I picked my torch up.

My men came inside one at a time, each of them dropping their weapons and torches when they saw what I did. Who could hardly blame them? What we just was almost too fantastic to believe.

I slowly approached the thing that gave us all such shock and

disbelief. The cave was huge, probably the size of the Great Hall back home and every inch of it seemed to be covered in sparkling metal. Gold and silver coins littered the floor like it was snow, piles of jewels formed miniature hills, and statues made of brass and bronze were lined up as if they were actual people having a conversation. Among my Tribe, Hannish the Second had been called the wealthiest Chief in all of Berk's history. Now, I think I just surpassed him.

"You can keep half of whatever you can carry," I said to my still stunned men and that was all the motivation they needed to move again. Each of them lined whatever pockets or bags they had with anything they could grab before they ran off to the ship using a speed few think would be possible.

Before long, the ship was loaded with riches. So full in fact, that we had to remove several dozen bags to make room for the crew... and I didn't think that was a hundredth of all the loot in that cave! I was sure going to tell him about it. He'd be so upset, but I think he'd forget it once we sent a few fleets over to take the rest of the treasure.

Really, this must have been the easiest haul anyone had ever gotten, so much that I was practically disappointed. Sure, all of this gold was going to be put to good use, but, couldn't there have been a little challenge? Then again, it seemed a little odd that someone was crazy enough to put all of their riches away like this. This was not even someone's grave, just a cave on some deserted island in the middle of nowhere. What sane person hid their assets away when they could use it for more productive things, like buying a good drink! I sighed, I suppose those ancient kings are an odd bunch, but now they they're not here to claim their wealth, I can profit off of some long dead ruler's insanity.

All I had to do now was sail home and laugh in his face. I would have set sail this very moment! if it were not for the tides. It turned out, there were jagged rocks around the area I landed us in. While the ship itself was not damaged, we were stuck until the tide was high enough for us to leave. Hopefully, we did not take in so much weight that the ship did not drop low enough to risk damaging the hull once high tide came.

So, we were forced to spend time, the Viking way. My men gathered around a campfire, each declaring the treasures they would keep for themselves and what they would do with them. One man, a bold warrior on his first voyage under my banner, declared how he would give a golden helmet to a friend of his. Another, nearby him stated how he would use a golden yak figurine to buy a whole herd. And then another man, one looking rather weary and tired, tried to brag about this fancy sword he received. The others laughed at him, when they pointed out that his sword was clearly missing its blade.

The third sailor tried to refute him, but all he said came out as a garbled gibberish. Clearly, lifting riches beyond his imagination was more exhausting than I thought it was. So, I sent him away, telling him to get some rest before the return trip home tomorrow. He complied, only because he was too lost to really say no.

After he was gone, my men returned to their merrymaking, exchanging stories and beverages until the dead of night. One by one, my men

fell, not by sword or axe, but to cup, until, only I remained.

With silence being my only company, I decided to check up on my afflicted crew member. Everyone else was fine, but I needed to make sure he was fit for duty in the morning. Otherwise, I would have to leave him behind.

I climbed onto my ship, noting a loud snoring coming from the ship's hold. It must have been my crew member, I mean, who else could snore that loudly? It's not like, we Vikings were known for our good bedside manners. Oh well, I better check up on him.

Opening a hatch, I descended.

What, I found was not my crew member. Curled up on the floor was a sleeping dragon, a Nadder to be precise. It's bluish-purple scales shimmered faintly in the lantern light, making me wonder how the creature got here in the first place. And where did my crewmember go?

I gritted my teeth. It didn't matter; I had to get rid of it, now.

I quietly drew my sword and approached the sleeping creature. All, I had to do was wake it and force it out of the hold or worst came to worst, slay it. Hopefully, it was more interested in saving its own life rather than fighting. Dragons were too smart to waste their lives if it could be avoided, right?

I slowly approached the creature, careful not to disturb it. Yet, despite my best efforts, the Nadder stirred and looked at me in a dazed state. I pointed my sword by its snout, making my threat clear.

The Nadder immediately noticed it was being threatened and got up with a roar, "Cock-a-doodle-do!" crowed the dragon,

I blinked. What just happened?

"Cock-a-doodle-do!" crowed the dragon again. Why was it crowing like a rooster?

I just shook my head. This, did not seem right. My eyes fluttered open, back and forth. The world around me seemed to dissolve slowly.

Suddenly, I was aware of not looking straight into a Nadder. Instead, I found myself looking into the inquisitive face of a rooster before it crowed again, "Cock-a-doodle-do!" It only took me a moment to realize the rooster had a pair of hands holding onto it.

And just like that, I was suddenly aware of who was responsible. "Toothless," I stated wearily. "why is there a rooster in the house?"

My brother's face came into view, dropping the flightless bird onto the floor. "Oh, that? I just told Dad we had to be up extra early today" so I figured, why not borrow a rooster from the Rumblefisks," he said with a confident smirk.

Immediately, I realized he was getting back at me for beating him in

our little spat yesterday. "This does not count," I said groggily.

Toothless's grin grew a little more overt. "It sure feels like it does."

Yawning, I just dragged myself off my bed to a nearby window. Well, at least Toothless was not still feeling down from yesterday, so that was a plus. I just wish it did not have to involve me waking up when the sun was just only just peaking out off the horizon. One of the worst things about being a Night Fury was that my body insisted in sleeping and waking in a pace that I could just never seem to get the hang of. It took me forever to get to sleep, yet in the morning, it takes a rooster blaring in my face to get me to so much as stir. "So, you remember where we're going?" I asked my younger brother.

"Off to the Meathead Islands to meet that Thuggory, that guy you keep writing to," said my Toothless.

"And?" I stated, my head dipping to the side before I righted it. Oh, Toothless, could you have at least woke me up at a time when I was not going to fall over?

"Hiccupâ€|" my younger brother said, in a tone of mild annoyance.

"Tell me why Toothless," I replied, in as firm a tone a half asleep Night Fury could manage. If my little brother was going to wake me up this early, I was going to leverage it against him.

"â€|Because Dad wants us to represent the Tribe in front of the Meatheads and to announce myself as Heir," A small, but aware part of my mind was taking a little enjoyment in forcing him to answer these questions. The other parts of me caught onâ€| Maybe, I should go back to sleep if I am acting this grouchy.

Shaking my head, I decided to cut my little bud some slack, "That's just a small part of the diplomacy. Dad wants to know if the Meatheads are willing to stand with us as allies against Alvin... or at least not to have Meatheads side up with the Outcasts." That later possibility was not out of the question; The threat of levying a powerful curse on a whole Tribe might be incentive enough to do things that would see crazy in any other set of circumstances. It is plainly obvious Vikings wanted to die in glorious battle as proud men of valor, cursing someone into a dragon denied them of the glory they wantedâ€| Maybe that's why I got over being turned into a dragon so quickly; I didn't exactly have much glory to begin with.

A small part of me realized that that thought was strangely consistent and logical for a half asleep dragon. Maybe I was beginning to wake upâ€| I yawnedâ€| or not.

"Soâ€| it's like the story about how the King treated with the Feather-Kin when they came for a visit?" asked Toothless.

I just grunted in response, "Sure, let's go with that." I did not know what historical Toothless was talking about, per say. Fishlegs might, but I was too tired to really question him about it. I suppose I should just brief further on the sail there.

I wandered back to my bed, intent on fixing it since I was going to be gone for a few days. Nowâ€|where were the sheets? I needed to fold them. Since, this was my first intertribal debut ever since I startedâ€| being a dragon, so I figure I might as well make sure everything was in order, even the things that really should not be all that important. What can I say?

"Uh, Hiccup," said my brother.

"Yeah, bud?" I questioned him offhandedly. Why couldn't I find my bed sheets?

My brother was hesitant for a moment, unsure of how to answer. "Uhâ€|" he stammered.

"Spit it out..." I began to get agitated.

"You don't have sheets anymore," said my brother, sheepishly.

I blinked for a moment before trying to shake the sleep off my eyes. I suddenly remembered that being several times the weight of my Dad meant that most wooden beds were not strong enough to support my incredible body weight. While I was fine sleeping on the floor for the first few days, Dad thought it would have been smart to get something moreâ€| appropriate for the firstborn son of a Chief. So, at my brother's suggestion, I had a nice slab of rock moved in to serve as a bedâ€| And well, Toothless recommended that I should just heat up new bed with a small blast of heat instead of relying on a large sheet of wool, so I did that instead of buying myself a new set of bed sheets since, it was just as goodâ€| Man, I was _really_ tired."That does not countâ€|" I stated groggily.

"Are you sure? I think I am almost tied up with you again," said Toothless.

"You know," said another voice said from behind us. Both my brother and I turned to see our father descending the nearby flight of stairs. He yawned, barely awake. He did not have much clothes on him and his belly revealed several patches of reddish orange scale that had formed. Like many others, our father was cursed by Alvin, unlike any one else, Dad still stayed Dad, even after weeks had rolled by, "Sometimes, I regret having kids. You boys sure know how to make a racket."

"Oh, so you wish you didn't have us?" said my brother.

The Chief just gave a brief chuckle as he arrived at the ground floor. "Or maybe if I had your mother around. Still don't know where she is," he muttered. Toothless cringed.

"Uh, yeah, well, Mother isâ€| busy," he replied.

"Oh, I'm sure she is," said our father. While Dad was more or less accepting of us beingâ€| dragons, past or present, I had no idea what he'd do if he found out about Mom. Mom and Dad have been kinda trying to kill each other, except, kinda' notâ€|what with her being a dragon Flight Commander and him being a Viking Chief. Still, it was not my secret to tell. Toothless grew up with Mom, it was his choice whether or not to reveal that little part; though our father clearly had his suspicions, since we practically said _everything else_.

Deciding that before I gave my brother any more points to hold against me, I needed to get myself from half asleep to three-quarters awake. Oh, and be ready to present myself to Meatheads; Toothless was probably right about me smelling like an entire seafood feast. That meant I needed to do something that four out of five Vikings found impossible to do, the kind of thing that sometimes involved entire quests to be accomplished before it became even considered, bathing.

Yawning, I picked a fresh bar of soap and a large brush from near the doorway. Lacking hands, I had to make due with the bar of soap slowly dissolving in my mouth, though it was not all that bad. Likely the animal fat or because my tastebuds areâ€| different now. Toothless shouted at me, before I could leave, "Hey, where are you going? This is not the time to have a bath!"

Dad seemed to consider it for a moment, before an idea popped into his mind. "Hm, now that's an interesting idea," said Father as he turned towards my younger brother. "I should give you a bath, son."

"Butâ€| what about Hiccup?" said my brother in disbelief.

"Oh, he's a big boy and he can take care of himself," my father said, giving a slight wink to me. A slight chuckle almost left my throat; Dad considering me 'capable' was a joke on so many levels. "Besides, you hardly know how to bathe yourself."

"I do, too," protested my younger brother.

"Pouring water over yourself does not count as bathing," I said.

Toothless just looked at me, a slight frown on his face. "And here I was thinking the rooster might be over doing it." A small, draconic smirk grew on my face. Well, it appeared I got the last laugh this time.

"This totally counts!" I shouted as I ran off before he could protest. Still, I doubted Dad would actually go through with bathing Toothless, rather the whole thing was just an elaborate tease.

I went to the back of the house. A large circular, wooden tub was there and by large, I meant, I could actually fit in it. It was not particularly tall though, maybe going up to my waist if I stood inside of it, but that was enough for me. It was already filled up with water, mostly gathered from some recent rain and hailstorms. It was another one of Dad's many, _many _concessions to having a dragon in the family. Granted, I don't think he minded this all that much, considering our last tub barely even fit meâ€| Never once did I think I would ever have to worry about being too large for something, now I was running into that problem so often.

Surprisingly though, the top of was covered in a small sheet of ice, thin enough that a needle could shatter it. There must have been a slight frost earlier last nightâ€| or maybe winter was coming earlier this year. I couldn't really tell if today had really been any cooler than it was a month ago, so it was possible, but we were nearing the season for itâ€| and now that I think about it, people have been

putting on heavier furs as of late.

I just shrugged. It did not matter right now. I threw my soap and brush inside and jumped into the tub. Eerily, the weird part about it was that it felt surprisingly warmer than I thought it would be. Now, I could still tell it was colder than the air outside the tub, but not _that_ cold. I never thought that I would miss shivering all that much.

At the very least, I was very, very awake now. Cold water was still just as good at shocking the body to its senses.. Now, came the hard part; bathing became a chore these days.

Unlike most Vikings, or dragons for that matter, I was not really all that adverse to bathing. In fact, I used to like the feeling of getting clean after a hard day's work or in the morning to freshen up. Used to. One major downside of being a dragon was the lack of hands. While my new paws could be used for a variety of things hands could, holding a brush was _not_ one of them.

I bit my brush again and rubbed its head against my bar of soap until it bubbled. Then holding my now soap covered brush in tow, I began rubbing the sudsy head against my wing. Fortunately, I at least could use my mouth to hold on to my brush and my body was flexible enough to get to most places. With some effort, I could even clean off back of my wings. Now, I knew dragons had their own method of cleaning themselves, but I imagine that licking oneself over and over again might not be all that clean.

Slowly, I began my routine, rubbing the brush against the soap before it came into contact with me. I've been through at least three weeks of being a dragon, so I've mostly worked out how to clean myself after some trial and error.

As I went through my routine a part of me went back to wondering about that dream I had. Ever since I met the King and I had an argument with him which ended up with me having my memories slowly altered for a few days, I have been having the oddest dreams. After the first incident, which also involved Toothless and I sharing an old and frightful memory, I've come to the conclusion that I ended up with a copy of my Mom's memories, altered to fit in with me; well, growing up under her guidance. Overall, a confusing experience, but at least it shed light over what exactly happened all these years.

Though this memory was different. This time, if I was applying the thought that was one of Mom's memories, then, I was assuming her role, becoming her. Oh, now that's creepy, becoming my own mother, not that having a part of my mother's memories was never not bizarre. Well, on top of that, this was a memory from before she became a dragon, I think.

Really though, I would like it if the dream was a little more clear. It was more like watching events unfold before my eyes. Small mercies, I guess. And my memory of what exactly happened there is a little fuzzy. Things happened, but only in the vaguest of senses, with all the details not really being brought up, except for a few random tidbits. In fact, towards the end, I think I am not really sure of what happened.

Shaking my head, I decided to think about it later; I still had to make last minute packing and preparations and I can't exactly do that while musing for an hour in a tub. I threw my brush away, once I was content with covering my body in soap. I dunked myself down into the water and washed the suds away.

Then, I leapt out of the tub, felling refreshed and ready to take on the day. Now, I wish I had a towel or something with me, people were going to see me! Hang on, I've been pretty much going bare for a few weeks and now was the time I decided to get self conscious? My priorities are skewed.

Still, I wished I had a towel, I did not exactly like to shake myself dry, but I guess I had no choice. I rapidly shook my body much like how a dog did. There were still a few droplets of water left stuck to me, but that'll be taken care of soon enough. Now that I was clean, I went back into the house.

Maybe after breakfast, I can check if Gobber had finished that project I gave him!

* * *

><p>"Now, do you have your extra clothes packed?"<p>

"Check," I replied, opening the pack by my side revealing a collection of red tunics and brown trousers.

"What about your weapons?"

"Check," I replied as I raised up a shortsword and my rudimentary crossbow.

"Your stuffed rat?"

"Dad," I said in an annoyed tone. Did he really have to go that far? As discretely as I could, I opened my backpack to see if it was still there. A long time ago, back when I was a small hatchling, I wanted a pet rat. I thought it would be nice to have something smaller than me for a change, since as a hatchling, the whole world towered over me. Mom never let me get one, but a small part of me still wanted to get one for novelty's sake. Then, one day, I found a toy rat in market place and well, I couldn't resist getting it, like some childish part of me decided that this was what I needed. Of course, both my brother and father had a good laugh about that the day I brought it home! and I did not want a repeat of that happening right now, especially not after yesterday's disastrous failure. "No, I don't have one," I lied. No one had to know to know it! even though I a small part of me knew it was already too late. Thanks, Dad. I really owe you one.

Behind me, I could hear a few laughs go off, all of them from a certain Nadder masquerading as a human. "Yes, you better have that ready," she suggested. She was joined by my varied friends, human and dragon alike, each wishing to see us off.

I glowered at no one in particular, putting up with the embarrassment and taking comfort in the fact it'd all be over soon. I can't believe I am actually thinking this, but I think I miss Mother's style of parenting. Unlike my Dad, she was a little more! assertive towards

me and well, everyone was pretty much too scared of her to really comment, let alone laugh. Dad on the other hand, while respected, his way of doing things ended up feeling awkward and a little embarrassing to me in public. Worst of all, I don't think he really notices any of it based on how kept a straight face. "Well, it's your first diplomatic mission without me!"

"My first diplomatic mission," I corrected. Also my first visit to a Library.

"Well, you got Hiccup, I um," father said, somewhat hesitantly, as if the confidence was drain out of him. "N-now, I-I'm counting on the two of you."

Hiccup and I both nodded solemnly, both of us ready. We turned our backs for one more moment, looking at those wanted to see us off. Astrid and Stormfly gave silent nods of approval, well, Astrid at least; Stormfly, not so much. Fishlegs and Meatlug handed me a list of various things to look for in the Library, from shapeshifter sagas and updated dragon notebooks to magical tomes and assorted poems. Snotlout and Hookfang gave a small disagreement on not being sent alongside us, Hookfang mostly just parroting my cousin; we tried not to listen. Lastly, Barf, Belch, and the twins tied to pull a last minute prank by stealing some underwear from Hiccup; it didn't work.

Before us were three longships, each of them technically fishing barges. After saying our last few goodbyes, we boarded the one that was owned by a pair of Vikings named Bucket, a tall man who wore a metal bucket on his head, and Mulch, a man missing some limbs like my mentor. They seemed alright and Dad was willing to trust them. "Don't worry, Chief. We'll make sure that they get too back in one piece," said the stout Viking.

"Ya," said the bucket headed man. "Nothin' will get them."

"I hope you're right, men," said my father.

"Eh you worry too much," said Gobber as he pushed a large crate onto the deck. What was in it, I did not know, but I can only assume it was Hiccup's side project. Now that I thought about it, Hiccup had been spending quite a bit of time this week with our blacksmithing master and yesterday Gobber pretty much spent the whole day working on something. "They're going to the islands next door, what's the worst that could happen?"

My brother groan audible. "He just had to say that!"

I squinted my eyes, not understanding what he meant. Despite automatically knowing Norse, there were just some things, some phrases that I just could not understand what he meant. "What?"

My brother just shook his head. "Well, hopefully it's nothing." I frowned, knowing there was more, but I didn't really contest him.

"Well, we better get you boys going before night falls," said Mulch. "Get ready to cast off," he

After a few more last parting words, the ships pulled out of port

and we were off to not so distant shores. It was just barely noon and the weather appeared to be great, if a little cold. Aside from flying, one of the things I'll miss the most about being a dragon is not having to worry about the weather too much. Human bodies get burned and they get cold too easily in my opinion. Still having the wind in my face was always a good feeling.

"So, remind me again why couldn't we use Camicazi's ship?" I asked my brother. At this point, people have gotten used to me being able to talk to my brother, so no one really paid us any attention. I figure that as the weird boy who ends up having a weird parentage, weird abilities are not all too farfetched.

"Because her mom does not like us very much," he replied. "And because Dad, despite Camicazi proving to be a trustworthy ally, does not want to lean too much on her?"

"Why?"

"Public image to the various Tribes," he stated. "You can't just use an ally's boat too much without looking weak in the eyes of the other Tribes."

"That soundsâ€¦ dumb," I replied. "What if the need is dire? Like say, you are overrun and need immediate reinforcement?"

"Well, then you're supposed to supposed to die in glorious combat and let your village get raided, your livestock butchered, and your family enslaved. Because looking weak in front of your neighbors means you'd just die a pointless and ignoble deathâ€¦ Try to at least die properly." said Hiccup, in tone absolutely dripping with sarcasm; he didn't approve of it any more than I did and that was plainly obvious. "Because that's obviously the right thing to do."

I nodded, finally getting the point. Really? All that for the sake of pride? Just how shallow of a reason did people need to justâ€¦ throw away their lives like that? But then again, dragons are not all that much better. I mean, Flight Commanders, the ruling warlords second only to the King, had similar attitudes for requesting another's aid. From what I remember, I heard that the King more often than not had to force them to work together during his long life. And that's not even factoring the independent enclaves outside of the King's ruleâ€¦ that is a nightmare that only a bard can properly explain. There's turf wars and disputes every single week from what I hear.

"So, this Thuggory, who exactly is he? I mean, I know that he's the Heir to the Meatheads and all because, I had to write the letters for you, butâ€¦ I don't know anything about him."

"Well, I don't know much either. I know he's a year or two older than me," said my brother. "And I owe him some favors because he's helped me out a couple times before, but so far, that's all he's really done to me. I imagine he can't be all that a bad guy." My brother's words were at leastâ€¦ somewhat reassuring. We were invited as guests by this 'Thuggory', which meant we put our safety into his hands.

Sighing, I asked another question, "So what about his people, the Meatheads?"

"Well, they're not much different from us, Hooligans," Hiccup stated. "We live so close to each other that every now and again, that someone in our two Tribes end up marrying and moving to one place or the other. Though, we don't really communicate with each other all that muchâ€¦"

"How so?"

"Well, even though we're only a few hours away from each other by sail, we rarely have ships moving between the two islands more frequently than a week. At least, that's how it is with the current setup of Chiefs. Dad and Mogadon had a very intense rivalry when they were young and that influenced how they treat the other Tribes."

For a moment, I thought about that. The two Tribes we so close physically, yet so far apart emotionallyâ€¦ Maybe that could change when Thuggory succeeds his father?

I just shook my head. More and more, I am beginning to understand a little bit of the world of humans. Really, it seemed like the best way to think about it was how the so called free enclaves were ruled.

"Any other Tribes I should worry about?"

"Well, you know about the Bog Burglars."

I nodded. That was Camicazi's Tribe and she was their Heir. "Are they really all female? I mean, how do they, well, have kids?"

"Not exactly," explained Hiccup. "They have men, but they don't ever formally join the Tribe as warriors, which the Bogs like to exaggerate as meaning, 'All-Female'â€¦"

I blinkedâ€¦ Not allowing men to join the warrior faction seemed odd. Amongst dragons, male and female alike were allowed to join the Knighthood or serve as conscripts for the Flights, with the only real factor limiting that being one's station or capabilities. But then againâ€¦ dragon females did not have to worry about being stuck at home for months at a time. "Why do they do that?"

"I think it's because most of other Tribes used to do much the same to girls," Hiccup stated. "And even then, only the best or the well connected get to go through formal trainingâ€¦"

So much for me thinking humans were a little ahead in some respects. As it turns out, there's a few things I think humans get wrong. I just shrugged, maybe I should move on, "Who else?"

"There's Hysterics, but they haven't been seen in the Barbaric Archipelago in decades, not since they sailed West."

I nodded. "Dad brought them up a while back, who were they?"

"A tribe of mad men and lunatics from what I heard. Most everyone in the Archipelago didn't like them. They believed in things like the Earth being roundâ€¦"

"Which I do," I reminded him.

"Among other crazy things. They also had a knack for dreaming up strange devices. They once claimed they had plans for machines that could fly or a ship powered by clouds."

I grunted in response. "That's preposterous." I can understand thinking the Earth was round and all, after all, we dragons did that for generations, but making a device that could fly or a ship powered by clouds and not the wind? Now, that's just silly. No wonder people thought they were mad. "If Vikings were meant to fly, they'd have been given wings," I snapped.

"Well, it's a good thing I have these then," said my brother as he promptly rubbed his snout against the insides of his wings.

"But you're a dragon!" I near automatically replied, but on second thought, I realized how much crazy that sort of debate would go. If Hiccup were not meant to fly, well, he wouldn't be a dragon but then he wasn't a Viking. But technically, he was under the law, but then, most people didn't really consider. Shaking my head, I decided to focus on the more important matter of learning. "What other Tribes do we have to worry about?"

"There's the Lava Louts. They were enemies of the Hooligans a long time ago, but we haven't really been in contact for at least a decade, so who knows?" shrugged Hiccup. "They live in a volcano and I know Dad likes to brag about stealing a 'Fire Stone' from them a while back. And I think they made armor from dragon scales." A part of me cringed when he said that. As I doubt dragons would have made an agreement with humans, at least not without some means of overcoming the language barrier, there is only one way they could have gotten those scales.

"Okay," I said, afraid of wanting to know more about them. "Who's next?"

"Well, you know the Outcasts, right?" asked my brother.

I frowned. "Yes," I stated in a bitter tone. "Everyone hates them because of their piracy on the other Tribes and because they are made up entirely of Outlaws, brigands, and all manner of exiles. And now they have dragons on their side because their leader has a magic spear that turns people into dragons. Your point?" Having spent a month with them, I would like to think I was an expert.

"There's one more Tribe I know about and well, people think they're worse," Hiccup stated in a solemn tone. That statement just drained the confidence right out of me. It was hard to imagine any Tribe actually being worse than the collection of misfits that were the Outcasts. My brother continued, "They go by the Murderous Tribe"

"What do they do?" I asked, hesitantly. Even though with a name like that, I can pretty much guess and be mostly right.

"Well, they kill people," stated Hiccup, confirming my suspicions. "More specifically, they brutally kill people and sacrifice them"

"To Odin?" I squinted my eyes. "Like Dad did with those yaks?" I knew a little about sacrificing, having been told the most basic stories

and little bits of information about the Aesir and the rules men lived by concerning them. For instance, I understood that launching an arrow over an enemy army in a specific manner meant that you were going to offer those slain in battle as a sacrifice, even though you were not burning them on an altar.

"No, they don't worship Odinâ€¦ at least, not like how Dad and I do it," explained my brother. "They apparently worship dragonsâ€¦and to do that, they offered men for the dragons to eat upon a tall peak."

Suddenly, I felt my gut fell out of my stomach, aware of something potentially disturbing. "But isn't it the other way around?" I said, hesitantly. "Dragons serving the men?"

Hiccup gave me a questioning look, probably not following. "Toothless, what are you talking about?"

I cringed, uncomfortable on how to explain this, but I had to. "I think I've heard of them beforeâ€¦this Murderous Tribe." My brother looked at me skeptically. "Honest," I said in as much a serious tone as I can muster. "Onlyâ€¦ things are backward from what I heardâ€¦"

"Uhâ€¦ how?"

"Every now and again, I've heard talk about a rogue enclave that apparently became subservient to the Herdâ€¦ and as a show of fealty to their new lords, they would offer the flesh of â€¦ other Kin for them to eat." Hiccup appeared to turn green and I shared the same feeling of disgust. If there was any mention of humans being offered to dragons, it might have gotten glossed over as not important to mentionâ€¦

"You know, I think I could have gone my whole life without ever knowing that," he said. "It was bad enough knowing there were dragons that ate people. Now I'm not sure what's worse."

"They might not be connected. They might live on opposite ends of the world for all we know." I suggested, though that didn't do much to relieve our disgust of them. I actually could not decide which was worse, that there were two groups who fed the opposite race to their apparent masters, or that there was one large one.

"Yeah, let's hope we never have to meet them," stated my brother.

"Ever," I added.

The rest of trip consisted of me asking Hiccup about some of the minor Tribes, such as the Shivering Shores, a small Tribe allied with Berk that our father visited yearly with gifts. There was a little talk of the so-called Berserker Tribe too, but Hiccup said he was not up to talking about them, for some reason, so I let that pass. In return, I told Hiccup a bit of how the dragon enclaves worked, once he started running out of things to talk about.

As they were called in the dragon language, the Sovereign and Independent Enclaves of Kin were the closest equivalent I knew of to Viking Tribes, each with its own allies and enemies. Usually, they

each consist of a single island, occupied by a single Breed of dragon; places like 'Changewing Island' hold such enclaves. From what I understand, a few of them even claim to be from a time before the King's rule began, though I can't really say if that claim is true or not. Still, a few, though largely independent, do have trade agreements and pacts with the King; such the Fireworm Matriarch on a particular island I once went that was required to tend to any Stoker Breeds in exchange for protections.

Before long though, Hiccup and I arrived at the port of Meathead Island.

"We're coming in!" yelled Mulch to his crew. The sails were immediately being reeled up, slowing us down gradually until we docked at the nearby pier.

Bucket pushed the loading ramp off, giving my elder the first step off. It was afterall, his right to decide who goes first as the Heir to the Hooligan Tribe.

Around the pier was a variety of armed men, each dressed up in a variety of chainmail and rugged furs. All of them seemed ready to fight at a moment's notice and I could not help like I was walking into a fiery pit. "Warm welcome," I commented.

"Not really, normally, I'd expect the siege catapults to aimed at the ship," my brother muttered.

"Gee, that makes me feel so much better," I responded. As if a few hundred pounds of rock coming at me were something I didn't need to be concerned about.

"Well, we better get moving, moving targets are harder to hit," said my brother as he left the ship; I followed behind him, ready to draw my crossbow at a moment's notice.

"Night Fury! Get down!" shouted one of them, sending the group, except for a few, braver or smarter warriors to just staring at the frightened warriors with displeasure. They immediately went back to standing at the ready once they realized how silly they looked.

My brother seemed to more annoyed by the whole scene than anything. "You know, I can honestly say that I got this sort of reaction more often before I became a dragon," he said, despite the fact that only I could understand him.

Two men approached two of us. The first was a man who was even bigger and more brutish than Dad was, the muscles on his biceps alone looked like they could crack my spine. Despite the weather getting slowly colder, he didn't even feel it was necessary to even have something as sleeves! This has have been Mogadon, the Chief of the Meathead Tribe.

Beside him was a somewhat smaller man—well, almost man. Thuggory appeared to be almost a miniature version of his father; 'almost' since he was almost practically a fully grown man from where I stood. Well, he was seventeen, practically an adult.

The two of them seemed to be discussing amongst themselves about something, the tone barely restrained, but what they were talking

about was unintelligible to my ears. It stopped only when Mogadon placed his hand on his son's shoulders and pushed him forward.

"Wow, you really weren't kidding, Hiccup," said the tall boy. "I knew you got yourself cursed into a dragon, but really who would have ever guessed that you'd be a Night Fury?"

I passed my brother a wooden plank from my bag and he began to scrawl something in the wood. Once he was done, he passed the wooden text to the Meathead Heir. 'LOKI MUST HAVE THOUGHT IT WAS FUNNY WHEN HE PLANNED THAT,' said the plank.

The tall boy gave a small smirk of barely contained laughter. I still didn't know who Loki was, but apparently, Thuggory did, enough to make it seem funny to him at least. The tall boy then turned me, "And you must be Toothless, his little brother."

"Little in every sense of the word," I replied.

Thuggory also gave a curt smile in my direction. Well, I guess he did not appear to be all bad. His Dad did not seem to like us very much, but I think Thuggory was fine with us on the island. But then, the smile faded, replaced by a more somber, serious face. "Well, I know you came here expecting help you're your islandâ€¦ but I don't think now is the right time."

I blinked, the thought only registering in my head a second too late. So late in fact, my brother had enough time to scribble in a lengthy question. 'BUT YOU SAID WE COULD COME IN THAT LETTER WE RECEIVED YESTERDAY.'

"That was yesterday," said Thuggory, "Something came up."

"What something?" I demanded. My brother and I have been putting off this trip for a while now, and then the moment we arrive, something happens? Sometimes, I really get the feeling the whole world just does not approve of me. Now, I was a littleâ€¦ well, a lot outraged.

Thuggory appeared hesitant to speak for a moment, but then I saw his lips move, giving his response. "We've got a Whispering Death under the village."

As he said those words, my anger subsided in an instant, replaced by something else. My mouth hung open, almost frozen. Was it _that_ Whispering Death?

'WHAT WHISPERING DEATH?' asked my brother.

"A nasty thing that showed up yesterday. Been digging holes all over the village. We're sure there's only one because it has this bite mark on one of its sides, like something tore into it and made sure it would never forget," said the Meathead Heir.

My blood ran ice cold. There was no doubt about who it was now. "Uh, we better go," I said, pulling my brother by the wing and hoping to return back to the ship. Hiccup did not budge.

"Wait," shouted Thuggory. "Hiccup, I think need to call in that favor of mine." I could hear Mogadon spit out a curse in the distance,

drowned out by the hesitant chatter of the townsfolk wondering what exactly was going on in the Meathead Heir's mind. "I want you to rid us of this creature."

* * *

><p>For some reason, chapter 2 of both stories has an overabundance of sailing related stuff.**

The stuffed rat is a reference to Book Toothless's desire of wanting a pet rat in one of the books. I've taken some liberties here and there, but I've pretty much tried to translate that desire into how it would fit into the story. Stuffed rat was the easiest solution.

I've always had an idea for "Independant" dragon factions, but I never had the chance to put them on to paper and develop them until now. I imagine that even in a race focused on power and honor like the dragons are, they would still have plenty outside of that rule. Plus, it's a nice way to explain why some dragons did not show up aiding the King in the movie. He does not rule all dragons, but he still has authority over plenty of them. Imagine the relationship between an Ancient Empire like Rome to smaller City-States, and you get the gist of how it works out.

3. Chapter 3

**Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

For some reason, chapter 2 was relatively unpopular, reviews wise. It was fine in terms of getting attention and well, most everyone was flocking to read the previous story. Just want to say, I do want to know what your thoughts are, since feedback does help me adjust the story better.

Anyways, with relatives now living in my house and the finalization of renovations, I think I can move forward to writing more frequently. Also, nearly a week to the second movie. This chapter is probably the shortest, but I got this one out early. Maybe with a bit of luck, I can get something out on the Weekend meeting my intentions for cutting the chapters into two parts to post twice as fast.

I would also like to thank CAN07 again for providing me a better picture to use for the story. He worked hard to edit the previous one to fit in better with the site's thumbnail system

Enjoy.

* * *

><p>"So let me get this straight, you want us to face a Whispering Death?" spat Toothless. "And not the small army of Viking warriors with biceps the size of my waist?" I would have written something out to ask Thuggory the same thing, but I think I was too busy pulling my jaw from the ground to botherâ€¦ I mean, really, what is it with people suddenly _wanting _me to do important things for them? I few months ago, I would have done practically anything to get this kind of attention and now I think I had too just much of

it.

Mogadon grunted, "Heh, the boy knows his place, not too dimwitted for a Hooligan boy. Boy, what's gotten into you, thinking this little runt and Stoick's little runt?" -he looked at me, and immediately corrected himself mid-word- "and not so little runts can do for us? Let the warriors do their job and fight."

"Father, we've already lost five buildings and six men; Grimmaw is too elusive and too dangerous."

"Pft," spat the Meathead Chief. "And you're sending off a so-called Heir who never knew about his father until a month ago and a boy who was so bad being a Viking, the gods decided to turn him into a dragon! Face it, son. Those two have been cursed by the gods; they can't help us."

Thuggory spoke up, making it clear he had made his decision and he was not backing down, even from the brute that was his dad. "Father," he snapped, as if that single word alone carried enough information and insistence to make a solid argument. His father in return glared at him and an argument practically seemed inevitable.

At this time, I managed to pull myself together, enough to try write a coherent reply. You could do this Hiccup, your father was counting on you, you could do this. 'OH, GREAT HIGH CHIEF OF THE MEATHEAD TRIBE, MY FATHER CALLS YOU HIS GREATEST AND MOST POWERFUL RIVAL.' I quickly scrawled. Holding my breath, I threw the wooden plank at his feet, drawing the attention of the two Meathead royalty present. You could do this Hiccup, right?

"Heh. Well, that's true. Hardly anyone will do for a good rival these days!" muttered the Meathead Chief, seemly forgetting his anger the moment he's been complimented. It seemed to be working.

Toothless gave me a questioning look, wondering what I was even doing, but he did not say a word, only give vague, questioning gestures. 'MY TRIBE IS IN DESPERATE NEED OF AID, I CAME HERE SEEKING THAT AID. I SIMPLY OFFER A TRADE, MY SERVICES.' I wrote. Hopefully, this worked. I knew better than to have this guy for an enemy, but maybe, just maybe, I can butter him up to agree to some sort of resolution. No matter what, I had to get my father the things he needed and to get access to the Library. While, I knew that while asking for help was often out of the question and a huge blow to the respect among the Tribes, trading did not seem to have the same stigma attached to it. See, it did not count as asking for help if you paid someone to do it for you. Yes, it is a technicality, but most Vikings did not care so long as an inconvenient problem was dealt with or if the payment was good enough.

"Uh, yeah," agreed Thuggory. "All we need to do is hire them!"

"Hmph," grunted his father. He seemed to consider it for a moment. On the one hand, he had far less respect to lose in hiring me; on the other, he risked giving a chance for my Dad to have something to brag about next time there was a Thing. But I knew what was going on his head, because the same thought was going on in mind: what were the chances that this boy and this dragon could actually succeed? What harm was there in letting us go by? "Fine, so, then here's the deal,"

he said. "If you lot take that beast off my island, I'll give you what you want; ships, iron, you name it. But if someone else gets it, you ain't getting so much as a wineskin for your troubles."

I nodded, Toothless did the same, although hesitantly..

Mogadon, laughed, very pleased with himself, which hopefully was good for me. "Well, then, you better get to work if you want to get paid." The Meathead Chief then turned to his men, all of them whispering and muttering with rampant speculation over what had just transpired right in front of them. With a only a quick glance from their leader, they stopped. Alright, men, most of you gots better things to do than sit around here watching these Hooligans and Ne'er-do-wells; I want everyone who does not have business here to leave the docks." At that, all and I mean all of the armed men put away their weapons and shields and went off to distant places, leaving behind only a few concerned and more civilian, well, less battle ready, looking villagers in their place. Traders and businessmen flocked to the ships, carefully avoiding me, and did their business.

Mulch looked at me from the ship, looking for approval. As the firstborn son, I did have the authority and command of the Ship, at least, on paper. In practices, I was just, well, the oldest son of the Chief, not a captain or a great leader. Still, Mulch did respect me more than most, so he asked. I gave him a silent nod, giving him permission to do what he needed to do. The ships each had a small store miscellaneous bulk cargo, such as fish and furs. Even if Mogadon's deal with me fell through, I knew I could at least get something else of value from the townsfolk through the small trades.

Mogadon himself then left, leaving behind only his son to finish business in his stead. "Well, that worked better than I thought. I was thinking he would cut you up and put you on the trophy wall," he told me. I cringed at that revelation, suddenly remembering something important. These days, I've gotten so used to people treating me wellâ€¦ like normal that I almost forgot that I now looked like the one trophy that could elevate even the lowliest runt to a mighty champion. Good thing I decided to be civilâ€¦

"Okayâ€¦" Toothless said, bewildered.. "So, now that that's out of the way, how are we supposed to take the Whispering Death down?"

"Well, that's why I got you for," said Thuggory. "I figure the best way to fight a dragon is to ask one, and well, Hiccup's the only dragon I know that can writeâ€¦ and well, he actually uses his head for something other than breaking rocksâ€¦"

"That he does," said my little brother, a small glimmer of a smile on his face. I tapped him on the shoulders a little, giving my silent thanks. And to think I was never appreciated by my own Tribe... In hindsight, maybe, I should have spent more time with Dad overseas, made more friends among the other Heirs, I seemed to be really popular among them. Sure, I might not have been a strong Heir physically, but I might have had good connections and sometimes that was more importantâ€¦

Thuggory then led us to a small table in a nearby hut. A map depicting the island was stuck to the table in the middle, with

dozens of little pins marked with flags of assorted colors above various points above the map. On another wall, there was a small cache of weapons, from axes to spears, to arrows to swords and opposite that was a wall with assorted trophies. This must have been Thuggory's base of operations.

Before Thuggory could even explain it, I took a closer look at the map, studying it to see if I could learn to discern a pattern. Clearly, Thuggory or some other Meathead was thinking ahead, plotting the assorted places where the Whispering Death appeared or where casualties were. While I did not know what each flag meant, I was able to understand what it was all for.

At the same time, Thuggory and Toothless had a small conversation together.

"So, you really Hiccup's little brother?" asked the Meathead Chief. That drew my attention immediately. It occurred to me, I might not have told Thuggory everything, the same way Toothless and I told Dad. I mean, I got him involved, with a few of the arcane things I've learned, but not really much on the stuff involving dragons. I mean, letters were not exactly the most secure form of information and well, sometimes, I had a hard time believing the mess I was steeped in.

"Uh, yeah, why do you ask that?" replied Toothless.

"Oh, well," Thuggory stumbled for a moment. "My Dad thinks that you're well, born at an Inn" Or in less polite terms, 'you are not a legitimate child'.

The whole thing seemed to have flown past my little brother. "Well, no, not an Inn. Mother had always told me that it was underneath a boat" Thuggory nodded, as if that statement meant something important enough to note. There was just so many ways that could be interpreted and the thought of what could be the one inside the Meathead Heir's head made me shudder. I mean, even though Toothless said we were brothers, that could still easily be interpreted to mean half-siblings. And well, depending on how far that rumor spread, that could affect either my Dad or my brother in harmful ways.

Before the situation got any more out of hand or a rumor could be spread, I quickly scrawled on a plank of wood, 'FOR THE RECORD, WE SHARE BOTH PARENTS. LONG STORY.'

This prompted Thuggory to immediately give me a confused look before shaking whatever thoughts he had away. "Well, nevermind," he stated. "We've got a mission at hand. So, we've got this Whispering Death on our island"

Before he could recap everything he said previously about the dragon, Toothless raised his hand and interjected. "Yeah, I know him," stated my brother. I nodded in confirmation. Toothless met him when he was very young and ended up having night terrors for years because of it. Recently, he also showed up on Outcast Island and in our dreams, but we hardly knew all that much about the dragon "Mother gave him that scar on his side."

"You mean that bite mark?" questioned the Meathead. "But isn't Valhallarama your mother? I mean I don't think any Viking has jaws

that bigâ€|"

I quickly scribbled in a response, 'YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW STRONG AN ANGRY MOTHER CAN BE.' At the same time, I scolded my brother to revealing that bit of information so soon, "Not now, Toothless; we shouldn't let him know about that stuff right nowâ€|". While I felt Thuggory was trustworthy, revealing to him that my brother was responsible for attacking an island, probably his own, was probably not going to go too well with the tall boyâ€| I did not want an enemy.

"Well, maybe," muttered the Meathead, buying the story. Technically I was not lying, but I still felt somewhat guilty about it. "So anyways," he said as he moved over to the map table. "We call him Grimmaw becauseâ€| any dragon that's been giving us this much trouble deserves a name and he's got a nasty jaw."

"So, what has he done?" I asked, Toothless relaying my words for me.

"That's the strange thing," said Thuggory as he approached the map on the table. "Dad doesn't believe me about this, but I've noticed somethingâ€| weird about where this dragon's been going."

"How weird?" asked my brother.

"Well, normally, you'd think dragons if they take a nest they'd only attacking the things that are close enough to threaten their nests or just rob store houses for food and whatnotâ€| Grimmaw does not do any of that. Every hour, on the hour, he attacks a building." Thuggory then placed his finger on a red flag by the middle of the map. "Granary, burned down, everything destroyed." He then moved to another red flag, this time closer to the docks. "Smithery, only the furnace was destroyed." And then another flag, this time blue and on the opposite end of the village limits. "Armory, front door brokenâ€| and only the front door."

Immediately, I began to see what Thuggory was pointing out. While, I knew dragons were much more than beasts, practically as smart as humans, this was odd even by their standards, especially since no normal dragon knows the functions of say a workshop or an armoryâ€|. Of course, this was probably not a normal dragon and I needed more information to actually make a correct guess in what way, but I had my suspicions. I just had to ask one more question. "ANY HOUSES DESTROYED?"

Thuggory shook his head. "That's the odd thing about it all. Other than as a result of collateral damage, Grimmaw never goes after any building that's just a house. Ever since he showed up, he's been going after the important buildings. I mean, what kind of dragon does that?"

"Dragons are smarter than you give them credit forâ€|" said Toothless, a small smirk on his face as he turned to glance at me. "I mean, take a look at this guy right here."

"Because I clearly know how to get us out of this messâ€|" I muttered. Still, it was easy to figure out that the Whispering Death was here for a reason, some sort of purpose he wanted the Meatheads to meet. What it was, I did not know, but that did not matter. "Do we

have an idea where Grimmaw will show up next?" I asked, Toothless relaying my words for me.

Thuggory shook his head. Well, that was worth a try. We had a pattern, but I guess one day was not enough information to figure out where it would go next. "And Dad isn't listen to me to me lately, so he isn't going to be giving us command of enough men to position at any of the important, undamaged buildings yet; we're on our own." That was really unfortunate. I was about to suggest we tried that and hoped we could get lucky, but apparently Thuggory had a rough relationship with his father as of late. Growing up, I've always heard about how Thuggory was the kind of boy my father wished I was. A perfect Heir, practically, blessed to be physically strong and able in mind. I figured that given these things, his dad probably listened to him, respected his son's judgment. I am not seeing any of that. Why was Mogadon opposing his son now?

I shook my head. I had my priorities and Thuggory could tell me later, I imagine. So, lacking any sane option, I might as well take the crazy one. Using the last wooden plank I had in a nearby bag, I suggested a harebrained scheme, one that would probably get me killed or seriously maimed, but I had no other choice other than to just wait for something to happen. No matter what, I had to stop that dragon so that I could do what was for the good of my Tribe and I can't do that without learning more about him. 'HAS THERE BEEN AN ESCAVATION THROUGH THE TUNNELS YET?'

As soon as I wrote that, my brother slapped the wooden board away from me. "Hiccup, are you crazy? Why do you want to go down there in those tunnels, in dark, where that _beast_ is and get killed?" he shouted.

"To learn," I said to him. "And, I need to talk to him, maybe work things out." Though, something told me the latter was practically going to be impossible. A few images flashed through my head, a dozen different ways I could be horribly injured by a Whispering Death's many teeth, but I blocked them out. I mean, I could probably fight him off now, hopefully.

"But it'll be very dark down there, your nightvision won't function without enough light," he said.

"You showed me how to echolocate. I'll see just fine." I replied. Another trick I learned was the strange, Night Fury specific art of being able to see with my ears. I just make a call with a specific tone and pitch and then a second or two later, my ears gave me a stange, colorless picture or shapes. It was weird at first, but even in total darkness, I could see clearly.

I turned to Thuggory again, who was mostly lost in the seemingly one sided conversation I had with my brother, though he seemed to glean what was going on. "Well, Dad has sent people through, but we haven't made any progress. I can take you to one of the nearby tunnels if you wanted."

"Well, lead the way," I said. Thuggory only gave me a confused look, not understanding because Toothless kept silent, looking at me with worry. Okay, that settled it. The first thing I'm getting from the Hairy Scary Librarian when I meet him is a way for me to let normal Vikings understand me, because having write things out or rely on

someone else to translate for me was really getting old. I don't care if I have to stay a dragon for another month, if it meant I could at least _talk _to people, ordinary people again, I think I could spend the next year covered in scales and not mind it.

Sighing, I picked up the wooden board and wrote my request again. This time, Thuggory complied and stepped out of the house. I was about to the same, but Toothless grabbed onto my wing, stopping me before I could leave. "Wait," he called to me.

"Toothless, I'm not going to pick a fight," I told him. "I'm just going to go down there, talk to him and leave

"But... Hiccup," he struggled to say. He appeared to be hesitant and that in turn was making me question if this was a smart idea after allâ€¦ Well, of course it wasn't, but maybe there was a better option? I shook my head.

"I have to go, bud" I said, as I pulled my wing free from my hands and stepped right outside.

Before I could run off though, a sudden weight fell upon my shoulders. I turned my head skyward, my eyes reaching the familiar green eyes that ran in my father's side; Toothless was on top of me.. "You're not going alone!"

* * *

><p>Why am I doing this? Why?<p>

Darkness surrounded me and the only comforts I had were those next to me. My brother was by my side, guiding us ever forward with cries inaudible to human ears, and Thuggory followed behind us, a sword ready to be drawn at a moment's notice. Yet, why was I here? What did I contribute other than just carrying a lamp?

I mean, it's not like I am really needed, right? I mean, Thuggory had muscle and my brotherâ€¦ well, was my brother. Surely, they didn't need me to go follow them headlong into a pit dug by _him_, right?

I turned my head behind us, imagining that I could a glimpse of the entrance, our way outâ€¦ In reality, I knew it was long gone now, my brother having led us down this tunnel for what felt like a timeless eternity. "You can go back now, you know," suggested my brother.

My fist was clenched hard against Hiccup's leathery wings and the heavy brass lantern, my only source of illumination. I mean, I should just be making sure I was with them right? Losing either of those things was just foolish. It wasn't because I was scared or anything.

"No, I-I'm fine," I told him. Yeah, I was. Why wouldn't I be?

"If you're sureâ€¦" Hiccup appeared satisfied and went back to guiding us ever forward.

Smirking to myself, I followed him steadily. Yeah, it was a good thing he was not forcing me to sit at the sidelines like the last time danger happened nearby. I am not afraid ofâ€¦ himâ€¦ and these darkâ€¦ dankâ€¦ tunnelsâ€¦

"Toothless, hurry up!" I heard my brother shout. Suddenly, I realized that Hiccup and Thuggory were now several feet away from me. When did they have the time to suddenly jump ahead of me.

"Hey, wait up!" I said, as I ran up to meet them.

Thuggory and Hiccup gave each other a look of some sort as I approached. Oh no, they must think I was scared..."Toothless, are you alright? You've been acting jittery." asked the Meathead Heir.

As Hiccup started going forward again, Thuggory and myself followed him.

"I'm not scared," I said to them.

"Iâ€| did not say you were scared," said the Meathead Heir. Well, good going, Toothless, now he thinks you're scared.

"Well, I'm not," I insisted. "I'm perfectly capable of-" Suddenly, the sound of something clang came from out of nowhere. In a sudden move, hid behind a nearby alcove in the cavewall, hoping to evade the danger, my eyes shut.

"Sorry!" I heard my brother yell. "Stepped in something!" I opened my eyes to see my brother pick up with his mouth a badly mangled piece of metal with what looked to lopped off horns as if it was â€| a helmet. Nearby, I also noticed the pelt of what must have been a yakâ€| and some discarded chainmail covered in a dark liquid. The implication plainly obvious to those presentâ€| most especially me, since I avoided that fate long ago.

"Wow," commented Thuggory. "Let's hope we're luckierâ€|" My brother and I could only nod in agreementâ€| Maybe, bravery is not all it's cut out to be?

"That's not all," said my brother as he took a few steps forward. Thuggory and I followed.

We arrived at some sort of cavern. While the tunnels we had just come from were surprisingly large enough not to feel claustrophobic all the time, this place wasâ€| big. There was plenty of room dug out, even a small lake in the middle of the areaâ€| and a glimmer of light shining daylight from the roof top, even though we were at least dozens if not a hundred feet underground. As the three of us approached, I became aware that there were a few bricks and loose stones surrounding the small hole leading to the surface.

Additionally, I took my lamp and navigated around the cavern, noting that there were at least a dozen or so other passage ways in and out. Whatever this place was, it must have been the very center of operations or at leastâ€| near it. If it was, then, why was he not here? An inkling feeling of dread hit my stomach, just before I could feel something in my bones rattle.

"The beast Grimmaw makes his lair underneath one of the wells!" shouted Thuggory. "Dad will really want to know about-"

My brother, having very good control over his tail ever since I

taught him how to control it properly, placed his tailfins directly ontop of the Meathead Heir's mouth, silencing him.

He looked down one of the caverns, specifically, the one I was immediately in front of. While I could only feel it at first, it was not long before I could hear the sound of something coming right at me at an impossible speed. And yet, I only stood there, my feet feeling like they had been turned into solid granite.

In an instant, I saw a brief glimpse of a teeth. Lots and lots of teeth come barreling right at me from one of the caves. "Young Night Fury!" I heard. At the same time, I felt a force slam into the side of my gut. With my eyes closed shut, I felt myself get hurled into a nearby wall just as a loud booming noise hit me.

When I opened my eyes, I saw the Whispering Death taking a bite out of the ground I had just left. Thuggory was right by to me, his massive arms around me. It only took me a second to realize he tackled me to save my life. "Uh, thanks," I told the Meathead Heir as I struggled to get to my feet and draw my weapon. Thankfully, between my lantern and the hole in the roof, there was plenty enough light for me to see what was going on.

"No problem," replied Thuggory as he grabbed on to his sword.

As the Whispering Death spat out the hard rock in its mouth, Hiccup leapt in between me and the dragon. The nearly blind dragon made a sound that was something like a hiss. "What is your business here?" he said in an almost guttural, broken tone.

Yes, it was him, the same beast that had plagued my dreams for years. With my brother's help, I had managed to conquer the idea of him that terrified me when I was younger, that still paled in comparison to the real thing. All one in my dreams could do was make me wish I could die of fright, this beast, could do so much worse.

"We didn't come here to pick a fight!" yelled my brother. "I just want to know why you've been attacking these Herd." Herd was what the dragons called humans, it was practically an insult, a denoting something as a lesser creature, now that I thought about it. While Hiccup and I do not think about humans the same way as normal dragons do, he was only using it because we were unsure of the made up and far less offensive sounds could be understood by him. Yeah, just think about that, not the teeth.

"That is none of your concern, fool!" spat the dragon. He then glared at me, coiling his body around. "Thrice, he has disturbed my den and thrice I sought to destroy him. Do not interfere!" And then the dragon lunged at me, while forgetting there was something else between him and his prize. Hiccup tackled the Whispering Death away, breaking him from his attack.

"You're not hurting Toothless, not now, not ever again," cried my brother as he planted his hind legs into the ground his front paws raised and ready to strike. His tail was raised in the air, able to be used as a whip if the situation called for it. Wings were tucked away, their sheer size not really all that useful in the caverns under dozens of feet of stone. Overall, Hiccup did what he could to guard himself against the dragon.

"Who are you? What is that little monster to you?" said the dragon as he approached Hiccup, a tone equal parts malice and curiosity in his words. I saw him sniff my brother, as if taking in his scent was that important.

"Because someone with five rows of razor sharp teeth can really call someone else a monster," said my brother, trying to take a jab at the dragon, he didn't seem to mind.

"Night Fury," he said, as if he suddenly realized something important, something obvious that he really should have known. Now that I thought about it, Whispering Deaths were nearly blind in many situations, mostly relying on stench and sound to even perceive the world around them. In fact, he might have even realized I was not covered in scale from head to toe or the fact I was not a hatchling given that he referred to me as 'young Night Fury', but my brother as just 'Night Fury'.

"What's going on?" asked Thuggory in a whisper. Unfortunately, as the only person who could not understand dragons, he was left out of the conversation.

"Nothing good," I whispered back a sudden feeling creeping out of my stomach.

And then the massive boulder class dragon said these few words, sending a chill down my spine. "You are _her _eldest"

While my brother did not immediately resist a dragon's attempts to smell him, he immediately jabbed the dragon in the face with his right paw once it clear things were about to become even worse. In response, the dragon attempted to lunge at my brother again, only to suffer another blow to the head.

Unfortunately, due my lack of well being a dragon limited me from teaching my brother and combat techniques other than describing a few things. While I had some of my friends able to teach him some dragon fighting, none of them had a body close enough to Night Fury's to really explain things all that well. Sure, I managed to teach a little tailfighting without having a tail, but only the most basic material. Like Mom did so long ago, Hiccup was trying to use what he knew of human fighting to give him some sort of edge. Unlike Mom though, Hiccup did not have nearly as much experience.

This time the Whispering Death did not go directly for an attack. Instead, he steered his head from the side and lunged in from that direction. Hiccup managed to block that attack, but he was not prepared for the follow up coming from his other side. The Whispering Death took a bite out of Hiccup's side, causing the Night Fury to give an anguished scream as the spinning teeth dug into his flesh. Hiccup tried to throw off the larger dragon, but all he managed to do was give the creature another opening. In the blink of an eye, the Whispering Death's serpentine body coiled around my brother's torso, his spike covered form causing him major discomfort.

"We gotta save him!" cried Thuggory his sword ready for the swing. He ran up toward the brawl between the two dragons. With a furious, challenging scream, he plunged his sword into the dragon's side, drawing some blood, but only barely leaving a mark. A Whispering Death was one of the toughest dragon Breeds I knew of and this was

proof enough of that.

But the Whispering Death did not relent, instead opting to coil around my brother all the more. "More! Give me more!" he shouted as he kept trying to bite off my brother's head. Hiccup forelegs were able to block the dragon's approach, for now, but he was still taking heavy damage from his resistance. Thuggory still tried to strike the twisting and tumbling mass of dragons and for the most part he was landing most of his blows against the Whispering Death, but it was still not enough. Thuggory and his blade were strong, but not strong enough.

At the same time, I started aiming down the sights of my crossbow, looking for an opening to launch my attack. But the battle was just too chaotic, too wild for me to take a safe shot. What if I hurt Hiccup again? If I injured him gravely here, who would help us? The King was not here and even if he was, what did I have to barter?

"Toothless!" I heard a voice call out to me, stealing me away from my thoughts. It was Hiccup. "Take the shot, take it now!" he commanded. He fell onto the ground, the Whispering Death lashing out with everything he had.

My crossbow far heavier than it should to be. I had to make this one shot, this one shot to give my brother the fighting chance he needed and it seemed pretty impossible. For one, though Thuggory and his big sword were hitting the Whispering Death, he was barely inflicting any damage; what hope did a simple crossbow have compared to that? Another thing was that my crossbow was not a repeater; I only had a single shot to work with. If I missed, that was that and my brother would probably perish before I could ready another shot.

Why did it have to come down to me? I mean, I'm not that good at shooting, right? That myth about a Night Fury never missing his mark was pretty much a lie, after all; we were not perfect. In fact, I wasn't even a Night Fury right now. Of course, I would miss such an important shot.

"What is the matter, young Night Fury?" said the Whispering Death, pausing his assault. Hiccup struggled to catch his breath, thankful he had at least this small comfort. Thuggory stopped, too, exhausted from swing his sword to no avail. In fact, a part of me wanted to say that the Whispering Death might not even realize Thuggory was striking him or even here at all. "Do you not care about your about your pathetic 'Kin'?"

"Leave him alone," I told him. "Why do you want us?"

"Your _mother_," spat the dragon. "She will pay for letting me live the rest of my life like this." Sure, enough, he understood Norse, something no ordinary dragon had a right to do so. The Whispering Death at one point must have been involved with some sorcery and may have very possibly been human, given how he spoke. I guess it's better to know these things, even when they'd do me no good.

"You know," said a weak voice. I turned to find it was Hiccup. His face and forelegs were bloodied, but he was still breathing. "There's far worse things than being like this," he said, turning his head to one side, since he could not gesture to himself any other way.

My brother's words though angered the Whispering Death. "Like what? You never lost your arms and legs? How about your sight?" He shouted. "How would you like to live the rest of your meaningless existence crawling in the dirt? Or to be treated as nothing more but a mindless beast by those you once considered friends?" For a split second, I saw him reel his massive head slightly backward, readying a final decisive attack.

And then... I don't know what happened. I heard a sound, something mechanical click and whir, followed by an anguished scream. I saw a puddle of blood splatter onto the floor, a bolt sticking out of the Whispering Death's left eye. I paused for a moment, looking at my crossbow; the drawstring was loose and the wheel I used to prime the prod was released. It took me a moment to realize, that I pulled the trigger; I wounded the Whispering Death, the very creature I had feared for so long.

Immediately, I turned back to my brother. He took advantage of the opportunity I had created and tossed the Whispering Death off of him and into a wall. Soon after, Hiccup was back on all fours, but still looking rather beaten for his trouble. However, he was not looking at the downed dragon and instead at one of the tunnels. "We have to get out of here!" he shouted. Thuggory was taken by surprise when Hiccup tackled him to get him on top of his wings. "Get on!"

Looking back at the dragon, I thought for a moment that maybe we were leaving too early. We could continue the fight and get hurt even more, accomplishing nothing. I promptly leapt on top of my brother and then we were off.

But just before we left the room, I saw the Whispering Death, bolt still stuck in his left eye, stir. "You cowards dare leave me?" he spat went back on his stomach? He then went after us, using his small wings to perform a sort of gliding maneuver.

"Grimmaw is coming for us!" shouted Thuggory.

"For a dragon without legs, he is sure fast!" yelled by brother, his breaths labored, but he still pressed on. "Hang on!"

I did so, grabbing on to Hiccup's wings. As I turned back, I realized that the Whispering Death was still coming for us and ever so slightly, inching forward. Looking ahead, I could only see blackness ahead. I did not know how far this tunnel was or how much more we had to go. Our trip inward took us at least thirty minutes and I was sure Hiccup was not going to last that long. At least not unless I did something to buy time.

I picked up my crossbow and loaded another bolt. "What are you doing?" asked Thuggory.

"Slowing him down!" I replied. Using practiced motions, I turned the wheel of my loading mechanism as fast as I could. I did not bother with aiming, though I at least made sure that I had my weapon pointed in the general direction of the thing. Then, as soon as I heard a distinctive click, the sound the machine created when it was ready, I pulled the trigger, launching a bolt at the slowly advancing dragon. The Whispering Death, still reeling from the blow I dealt him dodge out of the way, slowing down slightly and giving Hiccup more of a

lead.

At the same time, the Whispering Death launched volleys of its own, throwing its spines in a maddened out of control manner.

I did this for maybe eight, maybe nine times more, each cycling taking half a minute or what felt like one. My hand was starting to ache from turning the loading wheel as fast as I had been and I was unsure of how much more I could do it! "I see light!" shouted Hiccup. "We're almost there!" Fortunately, it seemed like I did not need to do too much more.

This time, I slowly turned the wheel as I took aim, one last shot.

"No, you will not escape!" shouted the Whispering Death.

"We just did!" I replied. I pulled my trigger one last time today. While it was true that Whispering Deaths had a very strong carapace that was almost impervious to most weapons, human and dragon alike, the same could not be said for their wings. Like in most other dragons, they were fragile and very vulnerable to being cut up. Aiming at the membrane, I cut a massive hole into the Whispering Death's right wing, a tear so large and abrupt that it caused the dragon to fall right out of his glide and run smack dab into the wall.

It was then Hiccup leapt out of the entrance, wings unfurled to give him enough lift to escape the pit. Thuggory and I tried to hold on, but we both lost our grip and off, just right outside the entrance.

Quickly, I rose to my feet, just in time to see Hiccup turn back to the pit and release a destructive blast, collapsing the tunnel. And then it was over, for now. The beast would have to spend some time if he wanted to come after us now and I doubted he could find us in the village.

I turned and approached my brother who had collapsed from the effort. "Nice shooting," he complimented, lazily. Hiccup was beat up hard dozens, maybe a hundred bite marks and scratches dotting his large form. While the same potion that turned Hiccup into a Night Fury also gave him a degree of ability to heal, my brother was still heavily injured.

"You , too!" I said. While I had not been hurt nearly as bad, the stress and the rush took their toll on me; my head throbbed and my vision was a bit blurry adjusting to the bright light of the afternoon sun. I laid on the ground by my brother, still aware that I could hurt him if I was not careful.

Faintly, I could see that we were in a market place of some sort, maybe the heart of the Meathead village. There were quite a lot of people around, all of them staring at the two of us, wondering what had just transpired underneath them. A dozen or so formed a tight circle around us, weapons ready. Thuggory approached a few of them and said some things to them, not sure what of what, but I don't think it mattered!

"You tired, bud?" Hiccup asked.

I nodded. "A littleâ€¦"

"Good, maybe we can have an afternoon nap," he suggested.

Yes, maybe that would be a good idea after all, a little rest. But there was a disturbing feeling gnawing at me; I knew there was something wrong. Now that the rush of emotions from battle had ended, I could not help but feel a little pain or maybe it was the absence of pain from my legs. Turning, saw a jagged spike sticking out of my lower left legâ€¦ and a small puddle of blood forming underneath it.

I should be concerned, frightened, yet for some reason, I couldn't. I just, did not feel all that bothered, all that worried, all that afraid. There were more important things to worry aboutâ€¦ like sleeping, like rest.

Yes, that was what I needed to do. I closed my eyes.

* * *

><p>No author's notes this time, except a note saying there are no notes.

4. Chapter 4

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. ****

****I know I left you guys on a cliff hanger earlier, well, there's a little side story coming today, something to give you a little break from the suspense and seriousness of the previous c****hapters. Instead, I give you a chance to see some characters we had not had a chance to peak into last story.****

****This story came out five days after, than my usual eight, these days, so at least, I am working on cutting down the time it takes for me to post. Hopefully, I can keep improving.****

****Also, for those of you who seen the new movie, congratz, I'll be seeing it later this week.****

****Enjoy and please remember to Reveiw.****

****I'll catch you guys next week or maybe even sooner than that.****

* * *

><p>Sometimes, I find it strange to be in my own body. The scales of my whitish underbelly and chin have never appeared to clear, nor did my blue coat glisten so well after a hard day's work. My assorted horns and spines were well trimmed to my satisfaction, as deadly and attractive as the finest of the Herd's, no, the human's unnatural weaponry. Now, I'm certain I am still as beautiful as I remember, perhaps even more so now after adding more ways to enhance my appearance to my daily routine. Looking, at my reflection in the murky water, yet, I could not believe this was me.<p>

Perhaps, I am just imagine things, I was still me, right? Honest, all I really did was use several of those waxy spheres that my Host's family was somewhat fondly of in this morning's bath and suddenly I am thinking I am completely different person. Sure, I did not expect that the fat from swine could ever be used to further the cause of cleanliness, but I don't think 'soap', as humans called it, removed things like identities, that would be silly.

Yet I cannot shake the awkward feeling of walking with these two massive legs while balancing my tail as a counter weight to my heavy front. Sure, I knew that compared to most other Kin, my Breed had relatively unstable footing, but it had never felt that odd to me until now.

Even worse, seeing the world with my two eyes felt especially strange; growing up, I've had to cope with occasionally missing things right in front of me, small objects would seemingly disappear from my sight once it got close enough to my snout, yet now that I have gotten so used to being able to see the space just beyond my own snout, that I almost feel dazed not being able to do so.

I sighed, looking at the piece of silvery jewelry I that hung, barely exposed from my pack. It was the doing of these trinkets, I reasoned. The amulets our temporary Flight Commander crafted for us kept us in human form as long as we wore them, the strange and arcane powers within them functioning for those who had originally been dragons. Though, due to an incident I will not find myself forgiving a certain _boy_ for some time, I lost my original trinket. As soon as _he_ comes back, I am going to pay him back for quite a few other offenses. Still, I would not be even considering such mad and convoluted thoughts were it not for a single decision I had made a few months ago.

Before, I had thought it was a simple scouting assignment, a small chance to earn a little prestige by attending the service of another Flight Commander. I even convinced a couple of my peers, my fellow Squires in the Knighthood, of the benefits of such a unique assignment, unknowing of what our task really was. Instead, we all found ourselves far away from home, in bodies not of our own, speaking to creatures that we were taught were little more than mindless animals. Then, I found myself imprisoned, only to be set free by the ones who placed me there.

At first, once it became the norm for false Kin to roam the streets, I thought I could distance myself, walk around as I truly was, in plain sight amongst the former Herd. I was asked by their Chief to educate them, and that did not require me to hide as I really was. But, then I received a simple white silk scarf and then I found myself 'borrowing' these infernal contraptions more every day, dawning on gifted clothing and my fine scarf.

"Are you okay?" asked a voice next to me. I turned to find my Host, hefting a wood cutting axe over her shoulder. Suddenly, I remembered I was in the middle of Berk, right by my Host's den, looking into a basin of water. It was well past noon, with the sky turning somewhat red around the sun as the rest darkened.

"I am fine, Astrid," I replied. Unlike other most humans, my Host had partaken of a cursed potion, one that allowed her to understand the speech of my Kin, yet cursed her to speak in our tongue, among other

maladies. It forced her to have to rely on either writing to communicate to others, but at least she could understand me in my rightful form.

The so-called 'shield-maiden' raised her axe, considering it for a moment as she put her back against the tree. "You're a terrible liar, you know that, Stormfly," 'Stormfly' was the name she and another gave me, a name closer sounding to one amongst my Kin, but ultimately, still a name given rather than earned.

"I am not lying," I snapped back. Really? She was questioning my word now? "I am perfectly fine."

"Because I've been here for the past half hour watching at you look at your own reflection," she said nonchalantly.

I clenched my jaw in frustration, my host was making this more difficult than she needed to. "It is a Nadder thing," I insisted. "You know how vain my kind are!" It is not every day that I get to use my Breed's reputation to my advantage, but here it was.

That caused Astrid to smirk, as if she had thought of something. Though, whatever it was, she did not allude to. "Whatever you say," was all she said, before changing the topic all together. "So, how was this today's class?" Well, at least she was not continuing that line of thoughtâ€|

Since me and my peers had been tasked with assisting the false Kin, I was in charge of teaching them the ways of flight. Nadders like myself were adept fliers, given a grace that only a slimmer, narrower body could afford; simply put, Gronckles and Nightmares often lacked natural agility due to their broader, heavier forms. It was simply natural that I taught them how to move in their new forms, fitting since, I was the only one of my peers to actually pay attention in classâ€|. If any one of us Squires was eligible to be a teacher, it would be me.

"Stormfly?" said my Host, breaking me from my concentration. "Are you listening to me?"

"Oh, I am," I replied. "Class wasâ€| fine." Aside from one young male who shall not be named, I felt today was a success, if a bit difficult. Most false Kin are hesitant about learning to fly; even though it had been nearly two weeks since their transformation, most still prefer to try to walk, rather than spread their wings. Such a shame really, but I cannot force them to give up so easily.

"Him, again?" asked my Host. I nodded, politely, since she knew about my one problem with teaching the so-called 'Dragon Training'. Honestly, the one applicant who was not distressed at joining my Kin in the least was quite possibly the most difficult 'student' I have ever met. Honestly, he was not even my studentâ€| or even anyone else's for that matter, the situation surrounding him wasâ€| unique to say the least. "Alright, I'll tell Snotlout to deal with him," said my Host. "Maybe get him to bother Hookfang instead."

Grateful, I bowed to my host. It was preferable to not put up with him for another day, let him be the problem for the slacker, the one born into fortune yet did little to earn it. "Yes, that will do nicely," I smirked; maybe I should have bothered my Host ages

ago.

"Well, we don't have much time then," said my Host as she picked up my pack and slowly went into her abode. I followed her. Mostly, I carried my around since it provided an easy place to put all of my things no matter what form I took, that and I liked the way it looked with me. "We better get you changed," she said. "We got weapon practice tonight."

I blinked. I forgot that my Host offered to teach me the ways of human combat. While, I will admit, I was somewhat enthralled by the use of steel arms and heavy blades to defend myselfâ€¦ that did require me to be in human form. I realize now that I might be spending a little far too much time away fromâ€¦ myself. "On second thought, I don't need those lessons, Astrid," I responded.

"Really?" asked my Host. "You seemed quite a eager to learn last nightâ€¦" Last night, I had been wondering about human combat practices, after a little talk we did about how what weapons dealt with what armor the most effectively and the combat styles employed by each.

"I am perfectly fine protecting myself in my natural form," I stated. In fact, one could say, I was one of the best in my league. "All I would need to do is remove the trinket around my neck."

"Ah, but what if you can't?" asked my Host as she placed my bag on a nearby chair. She did have a point, I needed to spend at least a few seconds to remove my amulet, allowing me to transform. Aside from that, there were places where assuming my true form might be problematicâ€¦ but even still, I doubted I would be in any place to begin with.

"Then, I won't get in a position, I can't," I insisted.

Astrid hummed a little, intriguing me. She clearly had something up her sleeveâ€¦ I really have been spending too much time in human form if I have begun to appropriate even their sayingsâ€¦ "Well, that's too bad," she stated as she turned her back to me. Now that I noticed it, I realized there was a feigned tone of surprise in her voice as she spoke to me, like she must have saw through my deception so cleanly. She was right, I needed to get better atâ€¦ lying to her. "Oh, really?" she questioned.

Before I could insist even further, I found myself barely evading my Host as she charged right at me. Side stepping away from her blow, I responded with a swipe of my tail, sending her off tumbling to the floor. Previously, I would have thought I won there and then, but I knew better, my Host was no weakling, though, not by any stretch of the imagination; before I could land another attack from my tail, she leapt, right from the floor, dodging my offense and landing on her feet.

Frustrated, I prepared a swift kick, but she slid right under my thigh and swiped at my legs, sending me toppling while she escape unscathed. Groaning, I tried to stand up, my legs and chest hurt, but that was fine; I would not expect any less of my Hostâ€¦ All that meant is that I needed to more aggressive.

"Yah!" my Host screamed as I felt her jump onto my back. Furiously, I

spun around in a circle, twice, building up momentum as she tried to scale my body. I felt her try to maintain her hold around my neck, a finishing move to bring me down, I felt, but it was already too late. Abruptly, I stopped spinning, sending her flying into a wall with a satisfying thump.

I approached her, a smile dawning on face. "Looks like I win," I shouted at her, feeling secure in my victory. To me, she appeared defeated, her back against the wall and with me in a position of such dominance, there was little she could do against me in such a disadvantageous position and we both knew it. On top of that, she looked somewhat winded, the breath likely forced out of her in my blow.

But then Astrid smirked and suddenly I felt less sure. With her free hand, she touched me and pulled my hand into view.

Shocked, I reached over my head and pulled the long red locks of hair into my view. My scales were gone, replaced my smooth and fair skin, my wings in particular had transformed into hands. It took me a moment to realize that I had become human sometime during the fight, but how? Immediately, I reach to the area by my neck, feeling the familiar, cold metal of an amulet against my neck. She must have put it on me when I tried to shake her off or something.

Before I could remove the amulet, my Host charged. In response, I tried to swipe my host again with my nonexistent tail, only to feel like an idiot for trying that stunt again. Soon, I found myself grabbed by the arm and lifted into the air. The image of one of the human siege towers, the ones with their catapults, entered my mind, the moment I realized something important; I was like a stone being cast from those weapons.

I hit the ground, in the flash, suddenly feeling the hurt creep through my body.

Astrid stood right over me, one boot over my chest. "No, it looks like I win," my Host said with a smirk.

And that was when I knew I was defeated. I dropped whatever struggling or plans of escape I had, for it was her victory. "Fine, just let me take this thing off," I said, tugging at the necklace around my neck.

"No way," she said. "I'm not letting you get into this position again. Hey Dad," she changed mid sentence.

Over by the door I found my Host's father, a traditional male, by their standards. "Young lady, this is a proper house hold, not a hostile wilderness!" he yelled at us.

"It was only a game," I said, feeling the answer should have been obvious. Really, I am astonished by how soft Viking youths liked to play it. Among my Kin, the use of teeth, body slams, and fire was considered a energetic and playful. For all these humans pride themselves on their valor and martial skill, they hardly teach their own children how to draw blood or how to lick their wounds.

"That's not what he's upset about," said my Host as she walked over to my back pack and pulled out my some clothes. Oh, right, I

forgot. I was a dragon not a minute ago. Yeah, on second thought, my Host's family let her have lethal weaponry when she was up to my knee, I doubted they coddled her. "Don't worry, Dad. I'll get her changed, right now."

"You better," said her father. "Honestly, sometimes, I think you might be a bad influence on my daughterâ€¦" I disagreed, feeling that his daughter was even worse on _me. _Though_,_ I did not voice it though other than a grunt.

My Host pulled me up and then we headed straight for her room. "You know, you could just let me turn back," I said once I felt we were out of ear shot from the elder man. Kin did not need clothing, neither for warmth nor for modesty, so it would have just been simpler for me to change bodies rather than to change clothesâ€¦| though, I will admit to liking the touch of silk again my smooth neck.

"And let you get out of training? That's not happening," stated flatly. I grunted in response, my back still hurt after all and I did not recover as quickly my Host did. Still, she was persistent, I will give her that. "Besides it might come in handy, especially once Camicazi arranges for us to hunt down Alvinâ€¦|"

Once she said that horrid creature's name, I stopped right in my tracks. Suddenly, I felt far more willing to subject myself to her tutoring, maybe even in the dirt. "Well, why didn't you say so?"

She merely shrugged, "Because I thought you already knew thatâ€¦|So are you coming or not?"

Nodding my head, I stepped forward, alongside my Host and my new teacher. Before, I had very little but then I had my Flight, the Knighthood, the opportunity that I craved for so long. Now that it is lost, all I had left was a burning hatred.

* * *

><p>As a bard, I had spent as much of my life understanding and memorizing songs, even crafting my own to preserve knowledge, to remember the stories and legends of my Kin. While I learned that Vikings did have their own bards, their own traditions of song, that was not their only way to remember. Writing, literature, reading, each mean different things, but all were all parts of a method, a system, one which knowledge can be preserved and passed on without bards, without sound.<p>

Humming to myself, I put my hand against the rune inscribed paper before me. The paper was hard, somewhat abrasive, with a very clear and defined physical form. I could pick it up, hold it in my hands, and manipulate it to my desires. Whatever was on it, though, was beyond my grasp; I could not comprehend it, nor could I feel it.

Even after all this time, I still only have barest understand what _he_ sees in these things. To me, each is a pattern of lines, strange symbols that held no special meaning, no sound. But to him, each is a font of knowledge, one that sprung up in abundance. I've tried to learn it a little, yet the understanding I sought still eluded me.

I know that alone, each line was virtually meaningless, as abstract to any Viking as they were to me or my Kin. I knew that by combining the lines, placing them in certain pattern, they could form a rune, a symbol that represented a specific sound and that by combining certain runes together in the right order they formed other sounds, specific tones, or even whole words if enough runes were used. In many ways, this was practically the same as how speech works, how combinations of sounds are joined together to produce something greater. That much was easy enough to grasp after spending some time, talking to _him._

And yet, I was still lacking. Though I had learned the theory, my understanding of the execution was poor; I still did not know enough about the sounds that each rune represented, let alone what whole collections of them even mean. At best, I had a vocabulary of maybeâ€|five words because of that. And even then, I doubted that learning more would make up for the inherent lack of tone, of volume, of _meaning_.

As a bard, my duty was more than simply keeping knowledge, I also had to hang on to the spirit of that knowledge, the feeling, the emotions it held. I could not see the sheet of paper I held in my hands hold on to that. And yet, he still valued themâ€|

It was a shame though, I felt that if he saw things from my perspective, no, listened to the songs of my Kin, he would understand my point. But alas, that might never come to pass, my cries in my true form are as unintelligible to him as I find the words I held in my hand. Really, it's the only reason I bother at all staying in this form, away from my rough hide and functional wings; I had no other means of communicating with him directly, otherwise. Maybe if I am fortunate, that might change.

"Meatlug, I'm home!" I heard. It was him. Fishlegs had returned, it was his house, his den, after all.

I simply turned my gaze to behind me, finding him enter the door of his house, a smile on his face. I could tell he was happy to see me, as much as I was; I returned his grin with one of my own. "How was your day?" I asked. Looking behind him, I could see that night had fallen, just a bit before supper time.

"Oh, not much. Just some more checkups," said Fishlegs. "Oh, and Roland broke his house down."

I froze, worried, but at the same time curious. "Really?"

"Yeah, sneezed it down," said the male.

"Is he hurt?" I askedâ€| Though a Thunderdrum might appear big and durable, I doubted many would unharmed from a collapsing building.

"Oh, he's fine. Sneezed just right outside his house when coming back from lunch." Fishlegs replied. "Chief's put an order to give him some replacement housing."

I nodded, well, false Kin or not, it was good to hear that the Thunderdrum was safe. In fact, I found myself giggling a little, find no reason to worry. While his den was gone, there was just something

humorous about knowing that it was demolished by a mere sneeze.

"So, what have you been up to?" Fishlegs asked me.

Quietly, I put away the paper I held in my hands away, it was unimportant. "Oh, nothing much," I said, being honest. "Still trying to figure out how to translate some of those words you gave me." I felt a little wrong for trying to come up with new words in my native tongue, to twist it and modify it to my needs, but it was necessary all the same. When I first met Fishlegs and his friends, I noticed the vast gulf of things my Kin lacked words to describe. While things like 'house' can be described accurately by using same phrases for 'den' or 'lair' and come off as easily understood, yet words like 'nails', 'coins', and even 'chairs' had no equivalent until I started coming up with terms to describe them. Without taking time to create a standard, a set of predetermined collection of sounds to stand in for these things, communication amongst the false Kin and eventually the true Kin would be difficult and problematic.

I will admit this task is especially difficult, even though as a bard, I had a wider access and knowledge of calls than most other Kin would have. Though, I will admit, this had been the most I had ever used my training as a bard in the past few months, my duties and role as a Squire not leaving me much time for anything else. Still, a master, someone dedicated to understanding sounds and words would have had an easier time cobbling up something together. It's especially hard because I keep forgetting the new words I make up without some way of easily remembering them.

"Oh, well, I suppose that's fine, there's no rush since we've got most of the common, more often used things out of the way anyways... I don't think many Vikings worry about the variety of words to describe the bones in a leg anyways, so I don't think it'll be that big of a deal." Fishlegs commented, before moving into the kitchen. "Besides, we've got supper to worry about."

I nodded; yes, food was far more important than worrying about than words no one will ever use. Now, that I noticed it, Fishlegs did have a heavy sack draped over his back; likely what humans called 'groceries'. "So what is for dinner?" I asked.

Fishlegs began unpacking the sack, an assortment of various vegetables gradually piling on the kitchen table. "Oh, just some soup before Mom and Dad show up," he said.

I went over to the collection of celery and cabbages, feeling a small pang of hunger come over me. I could feel my mouth watering a little as I stood by the carrot. "There's quite a lot of vegetables," I commented. And now that I thought about it, for all of the things Fishlegs brought, there was something missing. "You did not appear to bring any meat," I commented, not that I was feeling particularly upset about the lack of chicken, fish, or yak.

"No, not every soup needs meat, after all," replied Fishlegs. "Besides, well, you do like your vegetables. In fact, I think you might be a bit of a vegetarian as human."

I smirked, so he noticed that. I suppose it's a habit that I developed when I first assumed human form. For some reason, I tended to dislike meat and prefer vegetation. I suppose it might be because

as a dragon, I ate meat at every meal, yet as a human, I had the chance to try something new. It might also explain why Toothless enjoys his breads and cheeses as well as his sea foods. Among one other Kin I had heard aboutâ€ which gave an interesting idea. "So I suppose that makes me like Forest's Doom," I commented, knowing he wouldn't understand the reference one bit.

"Excuse me," said Fishlegs, stopping in between chopping the onions.

I smirked, "Oh, nothing, just this one story I heard of a Timberjack who ate any trees nearby him, so much so that the forest he lived in became a barren wasteland."

"Butâ€ Timberjacks don't eat trees," replied Fishlegs, utterly confused and missing the point of what I had said.

"And neither do Gronckles eat vegetables," I told him, though admittedly, I had a hard time taking that story seriously myself. Granted, sometimes I had a hard time believing some of the stories I learned.

Squinting, I could tell Fishlegs had caught on by now. "So, is he anything like Hati?"

"Who?"

"The wolf that'll one day eat the Moon or already ate it." Fishlegs explained. I frowned, still not getting it. "You know, one of Fenrir's sons?"

I nodded, vaguely remembering Fishlegs explain something about an utterly massive wolf with jaws that defied reason. Surely though, such a creature cannot possibly exist? I mean, my King does and while he might be huge, a creature with jaws that reached the sky sounded impossible. Besides, he sounded like some other Kin I heard about. "Well, if he's going he'll have to eat it before Chilling Heart does."

"What did he do again?" asked Fishlegs. I told him about this story a while ago, but it appears he had not remembered it completely.

"Ages ago, some say one of my Kin once proclaimed himself to be the most beautiful thing in the world," I said. "Up until someone said that the Moon was more beautiful. Thus began an endless quest to try to devour the Moon to take its beauty for his own. He began trying to fly higher and higher, with each attempt, he rose ever closer to his goal. Eventually though, he started to grow old, losing the beauty of his youth. When that happened, such was his vanity that he trapped himself in ice, to preserve his beauty for all time. Yet, that is not the end, some say that our King promised him a return to splendor, so that he might complete his quest when the ice thaws, renewed in both strength and appearance." It was long winded, and ultimately toneless without accompanying song, but this was a game of storytelling, one that we both had extensive knowledge to draw from.

Fishlegs hummed a little, appearing to be deep in thought. I could tell that my story had definitely given him something to wonder about. "Let me guess, most dragon think he's a Nadder?"

I smirked. "Well, if you ask Stormfly or any other Nadder Kin, they'll say that Chilling Heart was a unique Breed and that he claimed his beauty due to his unique appearance." Honestly, I did believe he was Nadder, the vanity of that Breed was sometimes a legend unto itself.

"Alright," muttered Fishlegs, thinking to himself with a faint smile. Now, it was his turn to top my story. The game had simple, unspoken rules; all one must do was pick a story, any story, it did not have to be short or long and simply speak it to the other. There was no victory condition, only the joy of sharing a story. While the early entries were only a sentence or so long, I had just upped the stakes. "So, how 'bout," he said. "Gobber told me this story one time, yet I have a hard time believing it."

"Go on," I said approving. Granted, if Fishlegs could not manage to top that spiel I made, I don't think I would think any less of him.

"So it starts with Gobber as a boy, about our age," Fishlegs began. He relayed a short tale of Vikings entombed in ice and how Gobber, the forgemaster for Toothless and Hiccup found some sort of treasure and about how he was pursued by a Bonenapper, one of the more unique Breeds. Then the story moved on to Gobber, slightly older and down a limb or two, on an island surrounded by hammerhead shark then being chased by the same Bonenapper. I had to admit Fishlegs did have some talent at storytelling, adding some facts, little details about sharks that I did not know about like the fact they had no bones except for their jaws. But what really surprised me was the next creature to show up in this story.

"Wait, there's a hammerhead whale?" I asked once we had reach that point.

"I know, that's where the story starts getting hard to believe," Fishlegs replied. I could only nod in agreement, yes, I agreed, this story was hard to believe because I think I heard it happen before.

The story continued, where Gobber was now in a juggle of some sort, followed by the Bonenapper again up a volcano and then a hammer yak burst from the volcano. Now I was getting really confused.

"A yak, really?"

"Yeah," said Fishlegs, "And it gets crazier!"

"Let me guess," I stated, feeling that I might want to confirm my suspicions here and now, because I still had a hard time believing what I was hearing. "Hammerhead yak on a hammerhead whale coming from a bolt of lightning in the ground?"

"Wait, you know that?"

"Only because I heard this story happen before" from the Bonenapper." I muttered, though technically, I did not actually hear the story from the Bonenapper himself, since he could barely speak, because he was missing an important piece of his armor that allowed him to properly vocalize. Because of how unusual his tale was, it had become the task of the bards to remember it in the event he perished,

piecing his story together from the his barely audible cries.

Fishlegs appeared much the same way I did, shocked and unbelieving. What were the chances we both knew the same story but from completely different points of view? Granted, in the original story I had heard little about humans, other than how the Bonenapper had been pursuing a thief for decades; I most remember it for the impossible 'hammerhead' creatures that pop up every now and again in the tale; it was simply bizarre to find them, here of all places, showing up in the exact same order in the exact same conditions. I'll even wager that if Fishlegs and I continued, we'd find more matching 'hammerheads' coming in utterly bizarre circumstances. "I don't know what I find more crazy, the fact that Bonenappers exist or that Gobber's story might actually be true!" mumbled Fishlegs.

"Well, weirder things have happened!" You are talking to a Gronckle, right?" I said sheepishly.

We both stared each other in the eyes; he had such nice blue ones. We were both silently trying to under the full extent of the implications of the tale. And then, suddenly, we both burst out laughing, realizing just how crazy the story was. I mean, really a man in the clouds summoning forth a yak and whale from the ground? Sure, why not at this stage? Men and dragons can change form, why can't men summoning impossible creatures from lightning?

Fishlegs, still chuckling, poured some chopped vegetables into boiling water. "You know, maybe Gobber and the Bonenapper mad up the story."

"Maybe," I agreed, little fits and hiccups of laughter escaping my lips. I started helping at this point, peeling away some at some cabbage. "Though, how'd they get together to plan that out if they can't understand each other?"

"The same way the twins can talk to Barf and Belch!" he suggested, clearly not being serious about it. At least, I hope he was not.

"I'm honestly surprised they never brought up the hammerhead falcon," I replied. "Almost as bad as the lack of actually hammers!"

The rest of the evening was spent with the two of us merely adding on impossible event after impossible creature to the story, trying to figure out how that tale could have actually happened or what kind of circumstances could my Kin have collaborated with a blacksmith. We both had fun at it, though eventually we had to stop once Fishlegs's parents arrived and dinner. It was silly and nonsensical, but neither of us really minded; even bards are not above spinning tales for the sake of creating one.

As I went to bed that night, by the floor of Fishlegs's bedside, I was thinking just how far I had come, about how my story has unfolded.

Originally, I had spent much of my life under the assumption that I would be focusing my studies on listening and telling the stories of other Kin, never once imagining that I would ever be a Squire or ever something other than a Gronckle. Yet, now here I am, a Squire whose

Flight is destroyed and gone and a _girl_, a human girl, not a female among my Kin. Sometimes, I wonder if sometime in the distant future, would a bard of my Kin believe the life I had lived? I was just having a hard time believing my own experiences.

Though the humans have stories about men becoming beasts, there were none such tales among my kind. I don't think I have ever heard of anything about Kin becoming non-Kin, so I have no idea what to expect or any inkling of how I am supposed to act. When this is all said and done, will I return home without Fishlegs? Will I stay here with him? What of my other Kin, would they choose the same fate?

Well, my story was not finished yet. I only had one way to find out.

* * *

><p>As to the identity of the guy that Meatlug and Stormfly talk about, I'll be bringing it up next sidestory time.

For the record, dragons are not neccesarilly naturally more violent. I am basing the idea that for them, since they have natural weapons built in, they likely have playfighting development similar to dogs and cat. And let me tell you, they can get really aggressive.

Interestingly in the books, Fishlegs's lack of parents is something of an oddity. Technically, he does have them, but does notâ€| have them. It's a spoiler for some, but for those who know what I am talking about, you know what I mean. The fact he has both might or might not be significant to you, for those who know of book Fishlegs.

Also, Meatlugs being a bit of a vegetarian is a small reference to Horror-Cow, Fish's book hunting dragon.

For the record, term 'hammerhead' is called something else in 'Dragonese' and the only reason it's written as such is due to translation conventions.

5. Chapter 5

**Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

**And now, we return to our regularly scheduled program. **

So, just watched the second movie. While I'm not going to spoil, I did end up finding quite a bit of stuff having some really serious implications in this story. Most of which could add quite a bit of subtext. Not going to say the second movie will be happening, as yet another sequel, but it does pique a few thoughts.

Oddly enough, I seem to be getting in the habit of making lots of words and posting the chapter every six days from when the previous was posted.

* * *

><p>My head hurt, like someone had hit my axe with a head and split it in two. My pain was wracked with heads, no, that wasn't right; my head was wracked _with pain_, not the other way around. Moreover while my head had a splitting headache, my body feltâ€| numb, like it was barely even there. I hadn't felt this bad in months, not since, I drank thatâ€|urgh. Where was I? Had something happen to me? Why was I like this?

I needed to know. My eyes stung, blurry and weak, were unable to see anything beyond the mass of vague shapes and glowing lights in front of me. My ears could faintly hear voices, sounds around me, but they were weak, like I was hearing only a distant echo from a mountainside over. Yet, I got the distinct impression they wereâ€| doing something to me. Were these my tormentors?

No, I had to get away from them; I can't let them get me! Iâ€| struggled, lifting my unseen, but still functioning arms to stop them. I could feel them push away against my oppressors hands, stopping them from harming me. I held them back from the meantime, but that was not enough, I had flee.

I rolled onto my stomach and found myself falling onto what could only have been a hard floor. Surprisingly, it did not hurt as much as I thought it did, so maybe I had the chance to flee before anything worse could happen. With as much force I had, I tried to get up and run. But the moment I tried to move my left leg, a surge of intense pain ran through my body, paralyzing me. Just what did my captors do to me to cause me such pain?

I could hear them giving vague, distorted cries and shouts, all of them loudly dealing, but no more understandable. Suddenly, I could feel the force several of hands grabbing onto me, pinning every part of me to the cold stone floor in the most uncomfortable and restrictive manner possible. I tried to struggle, but what strength I had was useless, accomplishing nothing.

What did they want with me? What did they have to gain from taking me? I was scared and I tried to cry out. Where was my brother? Where was Hiccup?

Then I felt was the touch of warm, smoothen scale gently rubbed back and forth over my check. Iâ€|stopped struggling.

â€|And then my leg burned with an indescribable pain, one that was beyond anything I had anything I had ever imagined. It was like all of the aches of my body, past and present, suddenly came up again, all just to ravage an area the size of pinprick. I screamed and shouted, the only thing I knew to do. Was this what my captors wanted?

And then, I wasâ€| fine. The pain in my leg stopped, the throbbing in my head disappeared. My sense were returned to me, with eyes able to the fading lights of campfires glowing in contrast to the night sky and my ears could listen to the sound of waves crashing against a sandy beach. I was glad my ordeal was over, happy to just be in a world where I was not so heavily impaired or at the mercy of those cruel, cruelâ€| things.

Yet, I knew something was strange about my current surroundings. I

was standing aboard some sort of longship, practically alone, not lying on the cold, stone floor at the feet of those who did â€¦ whatever they did to me. How exactly did I get here? And why suddenly start feeling better for that matter? Headaches and incredible pain do not just suddenly disappearâ€¦ at least, not without explanation.

And then, I heard the sound of a roar coming from beneath the deck, a Nadder's, if I remembered correctly. Iâ€¦ needed to get to the source of the noise, I might not be a dragon, but that did not mean I could just leave them to their fates. Finding, an open hatch and a set of stairs, I rapidly climbed downward.

Well, I could confirm finding the Nadder that made the roar. he, for I was fairly sure he was a he, ran around the room like some sort of headless chicken. For a moment, I thought I was going to be run over by the frightened dragon, but I felt pretty lucky when, somehow, the dragon went right past me, not turning me into a smear on the deck. This happened again and again, until I wised up and decided to hide away from the frantic circlesâ€¦ I also decided not to hide behind anything taller than me once I barely dodged falling pile of solid, golden cup. How that much gold got down here, I did not even know.

Yet, the dragon and I were not alone.

Across the other side of the barely lit hold, I saw a woman her back against a few crates.

Her features were fair, more so than the majority of Berk residents I met, almost as if she was a step above the rest. Where others were tall and broad, she was lean and compact. Her hair was some sort of brown, something very reminiscent, yet I could not recall , for all of this, I could feel from her a sort of power, a sort of strength, thatâ€¦ felt familiar to me. It was like I knew that even though she looked like some sort of beautiful maiden, she was not the sort of person to be trifled with. I just knew that she, like me, was hiding from the Nadder's out of control rampage, but unlike me, she was _not afraid, _instead one could argue, the _Nadder _was afraid of _her_.

She stepped out of the darkness the moment the frightened dragon threatened to run her over. "Stand back!" I heard her shout, a sword drawn and ready to strike if the Nadder if need be. The Nadder immediately complied, backing away a few steps, exhausted and tired from all the running. The woman stepped forward, sword still pointed at the Nadder, forcing the dragon back into a cornerâ€¦ "Now, I'm not going to hurt you, butâ€¦ if I find out you did something to my crewmate, you're going to regret itâ€¦"

I saw the Nadder open his mouth to speak, yet all I could hear were a few unintelligible sounds. Which was odd, I had been a dragon since birth, I knew the language and I understood it perfectly in human formâ€¦ Yet, even though the Nadder's speech felt familiar to me, they sounded little different from animal noises. Was this how humans hear what dragons say? Why was I suddenly unable to understand dragons? Did Iâ€¦ really change that much?

Shifting directions, the woman then started pushing the dragon towards the ladder that lead to the top deck, she wanted him gone,

not dead. "Okay, look, I don't want any troubleâ€¦ I just need you to leave so I can find my missing crewâ€¦" she said.

The Nadder tried to call again, making a loud shriek of what could only have been refusal.

The woman was starting to get frustrated and I could see her prepare to lunge at the dragon. I wanted to leap in, to get in between the two of them, but I suddenly felt somebody slam into me before I could stand, sending me to the floor. In that brief instant, I saw the woman's lunge miss entirely as the dragon quickly backed away, with everyone _knowing _that the woman could have ended it right then and there if she wanted it. "Go, leave!" she shouted... and the Nadder climbed out of the hold and left. Justâ€¦who was this woman?

And just as important as that, who was lying right on top of me? "Get off!" I shouted, trying to push the person who knocked me down. Whoever he was, he wasn't all that heavy, but he was certainly a little heavier than meâ€¦ I'm also a little surprised that the woman was not paying any attention to my shout or was not wondering about the loud thump that came from somewhere nearby, but I had plenty of time. As the complete stranger's weight left me, I turned myself around to seeâ€¦ that he was not a complete stranger.

It had been a long time since I seen my brother in a more human form, so much so that, I had grown used to seeing him as the large, scaly brother who towered over me and was large enough to act as a bed if he so desired. He was my 'big' brother after all and it was just easier to think of him like that. And yet I could see Hiccup, entirely human. "Hiccup?" I said, awestruck. "What are you doing here? And why are youâ€¦ like that?"

"Well, I could ask you the same thing, but I kind of already know how you got here, soâ€¦" said my brother, not making any sense.

"Hiccupâ€¦" I scowled.

"Sorry, bud," frowned my brother. "I just thought it'd be the easiest way to make sure you were alive..."

Wait, what? Did I die? Now that I thought about it, I did get hurt, didn't I? "Hiccup, what are you talking about?"

"After you fell, Thuggory and I had some healers work on you, to get the bleeding on your leg to stopâ€¦." My brother's tone started to get a little more dour, a frown emerging on his face. "But, well, sometimes, the healing itself killed peopleâ€¦" Stunned, I thought back to what had happened before I arrived on this ship. I was in great pain and utter confusion, afraid at those who were around me had some sort of plan to do horrible things to me; now my brother said they what they were doing was to heal me...

"How bad is it?" I asked, recalling that the Whispering Death left a spine in my leg. Just what kind of healing required someone to endure such searing pain? And why was my brother afraid of me dying after being 'treated'?

"Well, they aren't cutting the leg off, but you're probably going to be having problems walking for a while," said my brother, much to my

relief. I know that losing a limb as a result of fighting in considered a mark of honor, but I'm still not too keen to losing a leg if I can avoid it. Maybe if I wasn't allowed to walk for a month and if I thought the replacement was good enough, I could accept losing a limb, but right now, I am very attached to my body parts.

"So, I guess, I won't get any souvenirs," I said, now feeling good enough to joke about that.

"Well, I didn't get to keep mine, so it's only fair," muttered my brother, a small grin on his face.

"And what happened after that?"

"Well, I had you lay down next to me, thinking that maybe I could see if you were okay," my brother explained. Oh, so this was another dream. It happened infrequently, but sometimes if my brother and I were in close proximity to one another while asleep, we sometimes ended up sharing the same dream. Neither of us had any real control over it and sometimes, it was kind of embarrassing, but it happened and the two of us got used to it. This was just the first time it was actually, deliberately invoked for something really important. Still, that more or less explained Hiccup's odd appearance...

Which begged the question, if this was a dream, then what kind of dream was it? "So where are we?" Standing up, I also pointed at the woman. "And who is she?"

Hiccup looked at me for a moment, cringing. "Do you really want to know who she is?"

"Just tell me," I stated wearily. I mean, what's the worst it could be?

"Okay," conceded my brother, before pointing off in the woman's direction. "That's Mom and this is her another of her memories." I think I just felt my heart stop beating for a split second. That woman was Mother? This was what she looked like when she was human? Now that I thought about it, she closely resembled my brother. That also explained the aura she had about her, an air about her that resembled the air of control and authority I had grown up with. How could I have missed something like that?

I knew that Hiccup thought Mom might have used some of her memories to create a sort of set for my brother while he was under her 'care', but I never really believed it, nor did I think among those memories would be things from before her change. "Is that really, her?" I said sheepishly. My brother nodded.

I looked back the woman, at Mom. She choose not to kill or injure the Nadder, even though she easily could have. Instead, she just drove it away, apparently concerned for the safety of someone else. I would have expected her to at least leave a mark or spill a little blood. This was _nothing at all _like I expected of her; has life really been that harsh for her?

Mother looked through a pile of shredded cloth of some sort, rummaging through them to find something, a clue perhaps of that apparently missing crew member of hers. I had an inkling suspicion

that she was looking for clues in the wrong place; those clothes of did not look like there was any blood spilled...

"Captain!" my brother and I heard coming from the top deck. Two men climb downward, both looking weary but their weapons were drawn. "We heard fighting!" said one of the men.

"A Nadder got into the hold, but has now been left" said Mother.

"A Nadder? Are you injured?" shouted the other man.

"I'm fine, but we have a more pressing matter to attend to." Mother then held up the torn clothing belong to her missing crewman. "One of our own is missing."

"That dragon must have gotten Mop-Head and eaten him up!" said the other man. "We'll organize a party to hunt it down at your order!"

"Do not bother, Donnar," said my mother as she began walking out of the deck. "I don't think the dragon is to blame for our disappearance." Hiccup and I, followed her, both of us curious as to what was happening. We practically invisible to the others, one of the weird quirks of our dreams is that if it's a memory, if we were not there originally, then we might as well not be there at all.

The man, apparently, named Donnar seemed to take offense at that. "Captain, I know you've been talking about there's more to the beasties, but do you really think that one of them would just leave an easy meal like that lying around?"

"There were no bones or blood," replied mother, a slight frown on her face. "Dragons don't eat that cleanly."

"All I'm saying, Captain, is that well, if one of those beasts ever crawled into your son's room during a raid." Mother just scowled something fierce, prompting Donnar to stop talking. For a moment, I sighed with relief, well, I guess she isn't all _that_ different, right? Though, I will admit, most dragons on hunts aren't exactly the nicest bunch around.

Oddly enough, Hiccup seemed to take the possibility meeting a dragon as a babe a little better than I thought he would. "I don't know, I'm thinking it would have played with me" or taken me back to its nest because he thinks he was taking me home."

Mother then leapt off the boat and approached a large crowd of men and women. Most of them somewhat weary and exhausted, probably not expecting to wake at this hour, but all of them stood ready, gathered by the smoldering remnants of campfires. All told, there appeared to be a few dozen of them. "We're missing a man!" shouted mother. "Mop-Head has gone missing and I want teams searching the beach to find him!"

What began was a tedious and complicated affair with the gathered Vikings, each discussing plans and stratagems for organizing a search to find their lost friend. For every plan and every man who wanted to take charge, there was always a counterpoint and another leader requesting to enact it; all the while, a small minority advocated waiting for day before finding their lost crewman. For a moment, I

was almost mesmerized, recalling the few times I had once sat in for any of my Mother's meetings way back when. I had been a fledgling then, only taken along because Mother did not trust others to care for me, but the resemblances are uncanny. "This is too weird" I said.

"Tell me about it," added Hiccup. "Last time I got caught up in this dream, I _was_ _her_"

Almost on reflex, I cringed. Yeah, that definitely topped what I was seeing. "Alright, you win that one"

"Gee, I'm really glad to score another point" he replied.

The planning seemed to go on for what seemed like an eternity yet seemed to fit in within the blink of an eye at the same time. Half of the sailors went off, searching the interior of the island while the others remained behind, looking for their lost crewman by the campsite.

Mother oversaw the search of the campsite, followed directly by Donnar and a few other men. Hiccup and I followed them, but never too close, an odd feeling of foreboding warning us otherwise. Neither of us were really sure how long it had been, but Vikings had already gone over searching the whole of the ship a dozen times, finding no clues leading the missing man. "Captain, I've been thinking, don't you think it's a little weird that Mop-Head left behind his clothes, of all things?"

"He isn't exactly known for his cleanliness," commented another man.

"But tearing up his clothes and going naked? In this weather?" asked Donnar.

"Yes, it is strange" agreed Mother. I saw her approach a table, one littered with the remains of her lost crew member. "All that's left of him are on this table, the clothes on his back and the treasures he took for himself."

"You mean the sword hilt he's been bragging about?" asked Donnar, approaching the table. Now that it was pointed out, I noticed there was a very ornate looking hilt for a sword sitting atop a pile. guard seemed simple, but was made of solid gold. The grip appeared to be made of blackened leather, studded by and kept together by gold. Lastly, on the pommel sat a ruby, one that gave off some sort of fascinating allure I could not describe. Though it lacked a blade, it was, for all intents and purposes, a masterwork, the sort of thing that I could only dream about touching, let alone creating.

"You know" commented another man, "Now that I think about it, he had been acting kinda odd ever since he picked it up"

"Odd?" questioned my mother. My brother and I, too, took notice. Odd things seem to happen to us quite a bit. "What do you mean by odd?"

"You know how he went back in the cave to decide what he wanted to take home while the rest of us were having supper? Well, he never came back until I found him lying off in some corner," explained the

man. "Said he's been having aches and pains all over and rambling about being burned for a few minutes there before I knocked some sense in to himâ€¦" That was definitely oddâ€¦ and disturbingly familiar. Then again, I lived in a world where people end up getting burned all the time.

Mother, her curiosity clearly piqued, went over to the golden sword hilt. "You mean to tell me that this might have a sort of connection to our missing crewman?"

"All's I know is that he got it after I found himâ€¦" said the man. "Can't blame him, it looks real pretty."

"Yes, it does look facinatingâ€¦ doesn't it?" Mother's hand then slowly approached the gem, seemingly drawn to itâ€¦ I might have probably decided to touch it for myself.

And then fire erupted from the hilt. In all directions, wailing tendrils of flame wrapped around the Vikings, engulfing them completelyâ€¦ and my brother and I were not that far behind. For a moment, I was expected, to wither away and become nothing but charred ash; I certainly felt like I was. Yet, I saw that no matter how much the fire consumed me, no matter how much it seared my flesh, I was notâ€¦ dying. We were all burned alive, but not being burned. I could hear my brother scream out and cry in agony, drowned out only by the noise I myself gave out.

Iâ€¦ don't know how long it was after that. I opened my eyes, noticing that the sky had turned somewhat brighter, maybe sometime nearing dawn. It must have been a few hours since the last time. Before me was my brother, a Night Fury once more. "Hiccup?" I croaked. I noticed my voice was deeper now and that my hands were a little blacker, thicker than I remembered them beingâ€¦ I was a Night Fury again, but how?

My brother stirred, pulling himself off from where he laidâ€¦ odd enough, he didn't seem all too worried, if anything, he seemed somewhat annoyed. "Great, more fire turning me into a dragon, again, just what I wanted," he commented.

"What happened?" I said, wearily. I tried standing up, my body aching a little. It felt awkward to say the least to put myself on all fours again after so long relying on two legs, but I was able to manage.

"Oh, nothing, just a little reminder that not even my dreams are safe," muttered my brother, whatever that meant.

Shaking my head, not wanting to go learn what my brother was rambling about, I decided to go check on my mother. I turned myself into the direction of where she and the other Vikings wereâ€¦ last night? Or maybe it was a moment ago? Dream time, might not be like normal time.

I could not immediately find her though, but I did end up seeing other dragons, all of them wailing and whining something over something. One of the Nadders I saw had a problem controlling his nose, constantly bending over to sniff at a nearby Gronckle like it was some sort of obsession. That Gronckle meanwhile kept trying to bite the Nadder away, huddled in a corner and weeping to herself. A

nearby Nightmare was constantly setting fire to everything every time he so much as opened his mouth, only countered by a scaldron closing his. And that was nothing compared to the Zippleback that couldn't tell left from right. It only took me a second to realize the dragons must have been my Mother's former crew, transfigured into dragons the same way my brother and I just had.

I decided to back away from, not really wanting to see too much of their suffering. I don't think I could see too much more without breaking, but instead, I found myself looking straight into a very familiar looking eye, one that I distinctly remember shooting out.

"I can't see!" cried out its bearer a, no, the Whispering Death. I jumped back, in startled surprise, not really expecting to find him here of all places. He thrashed and writhed in chaotic spasms, unable to control his own movements in any way. He hit himself on the head, smacking his head into floor repeatedly. "Help me! Help me!"

And that was when a Night Fury, my Mother, appeared before the Whispering Death. While her motions were awkward and somewhat poorly coordinately, she was the only dragon who had any real control over her new body. She took charge, leading by example. "Calm down, everyone! Calm down." The dragons all focused in on my mother, their pain, suffering, and confusion almost vanishing at her command for all but one. "You, too, settle down," she said to the last one.

"Captain, is that you?" cried the Whispering Death as he continually injured himself. Now, I know that young Whispering Deaths had an issue with controlling themselves, often to the point of being considered more dangerous as infants than they were as adults but this was just sad. The Whispering Death appeared to be trying to do himself in by either alternating between eating himself or hitting himself until he split his head open. This was the creature I had been so scared of for so long? Did I really need to take his eye from him, when he already lost so much?

"Yes, it is I," said the Night Fury. "You're not alone, we're here for you." I saw the Whispering Death's body go limp for a moment, giving up on doing anything more complicated than breathing.

"It's like I'm blind!" cried the downed dragon.

"What happened to us?" asked another.

"I don't know," said my Mother. "But whatever happens, we have to stick together. We'll also need to let the others know what had happened"

Hiccup approached me, bringing with him a question, "Does this remind you of anything?"

I nodded. Now, this memory finally made sense. This was the memory where my Mother had been transformed, and I along with her. Moreover, I learned that she was transformed by a very method similar to the one Alvin used on Berk; was there a connection between them? I mean, they were so similar, from what I could tell. If this was true, did that mean that if I learned how to cure all of Berk, would I be able to take her home? But if that was the case, why did using the

arrows work for me but not Roland?

"Captain! I see somebody!" I heard one of the transformed sailors shout.

"It's the others!" shouted another one. Listening to them, my brother and I turned our attention to where the new dragons pointed at.

And sure enough, over on the horizon, I saw a group of Vikings, the rest of my mother's crew arriving back from their search. On closer inspection though, I noticed what appeared to be a dragon's head behind held up on a spear. More specifically, it used to belong to a Nadder. They found their lost crewman.

I turned to my brother, who cringed at the sight of the newcomers. I think we both knew how this was going to end and I did not want to watch. "Can we wake up now?"

* * *

><p>I blinked my eyes awake, realizing dimly how exhausted I felt. Isn't the whole point of resting relieve exhaustion, not add more? Now, I felt like I had been mauled by the Whispering Death as I slept, because at this point, I wouldn't put it past the gods. Maybe I should not have been so anxious to see if Toothless wasâ€| Realizing that I had to make sure my little brother was well, I immediately checked on him, his stirring form under my wing; he, too, was waking up.<p>

"Can we not do that again?" he groaned. Fortunately for us, the dream had ended just before things could have gotten much worse. We saw a bit of fighting where half of Mom's crew attempted to fight those who were transformed, thinking they were ordinary dragons, but the dream ended mercifully after that.

"Depends on whether or not you get that hurt again," I replied, wryly. We were both on the floor of a mostly empty room, a few mats and clothes separating us from each other.

"Well, you're not a very good bed," he said giving me a little punch to the stomach.

"Oh, really? That's the last time I let you sleep by me," I joked.

He and I locked gazes, a big smirk on facesâ€| well, what passed for a smirk. Then, I licked my brother on the cheek, forcing him to squeal in surprise.

"Hey, stop!" he laughed, gentling pushing my head away. "You know how I feel about that!" I grinned, a small, toothless grin. Of course, I did. I licked him again, receiving a playful slap in return.

Oh, so that's how he wanted to play, huh? Well, this time, I made sure the next lick across his face was full of extra slobber, the kind that doesn't wash out as well.

I used to think it was odd to lick others, but lately, I've come to accept it. It was a fact of life, dragons displayed affection through their tongue and I was fine doing it to others. Besides, no matter

how much Toothless protested, the big grin on his face said otherwise.

We continued going at each other a few more times, with Toothless continually denying he enjoyed it and I making sure he did.

We only stopped once we realized someone else was there; Thuggory entered the room, carrying somewhat small storage bin with him. "Uh, am I interrupting something?"

Toothless panicked for a moment, turning away to wipe off the slobber on his face. "Uh, nothing. Nothing at all."

"Oh, uh, that's good then, Toothless." admitted the Meathead Chief. "You gave us a bit of a panic back there, with your leg and all. How is it?"

"Hurting," said Toothless, flexing his leg. "I almost feel like like's going to fall off. Just what did you guys do to me?"

"It's best if you don't know," I commented. I don't exactly have the most faith in Viking medical practices. We treat people with colds using leeches and pour beeswax over the injured, because that's what we knew. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. About the only thing I am glad for Toothless's treatment was that it did not involving stitching his wound closed. Half the time, people I knew tended to be in worse shape after stitching, their wounds suddenly festering despite being mended. So for Toothless, we had to seal it up another way, something _slightly_ _less_ _lethal_ and far more painfulâ€¦ I'm just glad he's alive, glad that I did not let him down..

Thuggory then gave me bit of a smile as he approached. "And Hiccup, wow, you're looking way better already!" The Meathead Heir then began circling examining my scales closely. Eventually, he grabbed onto one of my paws. Oh, I forgot to let him know about that weird quirk of mine. "You even don't have a scratch on you!" Thuggory exclaimed. "Grimmaw just thrashed you yesterday until I thought you'd be a bloody pincushion and you don't even have a scar to prove it happened!"

"Yeah, that's my brother! He can bounce back from everything." Toothless proudly proclaimedâ€¦ Proud of me... "He even once regrew his legs!"

"Wow," said Thuggory. "Maybe you guys could tell me how you're able to do that. Must be really handy."

"Iâ€¦ wouldn't recommend it, there's a nasty downside," muttered Toothless.

"Well, unless you're fine living the rest of your life covered in scales," I said, though I knew chances were that Thuggory would not be understand me, but I had a feel.

"Oh, so that's how it happened," exclaimed the Meathead Heir, understanding. "Being a near invincible dragon or being able to host a sword. Can't say Dad will approve of the first one."

It was one of the weirder things I learned about. When I got the book

from Trader Johann so long ago, one of the first things I saw was a potion that would give me the strength I lacked, the chance to finally be somewhere close to what my father thought as an ideal Viking. It did that and more; whenever I was injured badly enough, my wounds would rapidly knit themselves back together and any missing limbs would slowly regrow in a few hours, but at the cost of making me a dragon a bit at a time. Thankfully, at this point, I didn't have to worry about transforming even more and a good deal of the downsides of being a dragon had been partially mitigated. "Well, it's not all bad," I admitted. "I get to do this!" Then I promptly gave another quick lick in my little brother's direction.

"Hey!" Toothless squeaked.

Thuggory burst into a deep belly laugh at the scene, a grin on his face. He took maybe a minute or two to stop laughing completely. "Boy, Hiccup, I have no idea how you manage to do any of this."

"That's fine. I don't either," I said. Toothless decided at this time to go translate for me.

"Uh, so anyways, we haven't seen hide nor tail of Grimmaw since yesterday." said the Meathead Heir, dropping the storage bin near us. Opening it, I saw a small variety of things, mostly letters and assorted pieces of fruit. "Folks are real grateful for your help, especially you got from Alvin a while back."

"Oh, apples! Thank you, Thuggory, I'm starved." said my little brother, sitting up straight.

"No problem. I'm just hoping that what you did got him off my island for good." At this point, Thuggory took a step back and went straight for the door. Before he left, Thuggory turned back to us. "Oh, I almost forgot. I managed to talk Dad into letting you the Hairy Scary Librarian. Just go to the Meathead Public Library and I'll introduce you all." And then, Thuggory was gone.

Toothless took an apple from the bin. He bit it with a satisfied crunch. I would have joined him but these days, my stomach couldn't handle fruits as well as it used to. After he was done with the first piece of fruit, my little brother then took another one, this time, one with a letter attached to it. He slowly read it while he ate.

Looking at the letter from behind him, I could see it was a simple thank you letter, a small short and informal message of praise. It figured that we'd get one of these eventually, I mean, my brother and I did more or less stop the Whispering Death's attacks, and before that, we liberated plenty of captives from Outcast Island, plenty of whom were Meatheads; I just never expected we'd get this many of them. Thankfully, the letter did not seem all too complex, so he didn't need my help to read it for him; hopefully, the rest of the letters were the same. Though, one thing about the letter caught my attention, the letter was addressed to Toothless, specifically.

Curious, I wondered if there were any letters for me. I lifted the bin by my mouth, spilling the entire contents onto the soft mats that had served as my bed. Then, I quickly swept through letters, glancing

to who they were addressed to. All of them appeared addressed to me little brotherâ€|

"Hey, is something wrong?" asked Toothless.

"Oh, nothing important," I said. Toothless just shrugged, going back to reading the messages he got. Maybe I was getting a head of myself. There were lots of letters and they were all in a disorganized heap of fruit and parchment, most of them had the addresses facing down and I was just looking at some of one Toothless got. If Fishlegs were here, he'd be telling me all about statistics and how things like shaking the bin could adversely affect it; it was just only a coincidence that I was not finding anything meant for me.

Besides, it's not like I should be worried about something like that. I've had plenty of mail before, usually complaints about me knocking someone out or giving out black eyes. It's not like I needed anything more from the Meatheads and it's not like I really deserved anyone's approvalâ€| though, I'll admit it would be nice to have someone like Toothless cheering me on. I might as well just look around, see if I can get any of the ones meant for me. Using my paw, I dragged one of the letters into view, knocking away anything in the way.

Dear Heir of the Hooligan Tribe, it read. See, you were just imagine things, Hiccup. I mean, sure they don't know you name, but you can't expect everyone to know who you are. My family and I would like to thank you for your help in defeating the Whispering Death Grimshaw. When we heard that you shot that foul beast in the eyeâ€| Wait, that's not right, but there it was. The letter went on and on, referring to Toothless specifically as the Heir, even citing the injury he took to the foot and wishing him the best of luck. No, it was probably just nothing. I mean, sometimes, people think that both sons of a Chief are equally capable of being the Heir to the throne, even though the eldest usually had the upper hand.

I decided to go read another letter, this time it reference the "Hope and Heir to the Tribe of the Hairy Hooligans", my titleâ€| but at the end it referenced Toothless again. Why? I picked another letter, again it was for Toothless and again it praised him, calling him the "Pride of Chief Stoick". Okay, maybe that was just an opinion, no need to worry Hiccup.

This time, I found another. It did not have any reference to who it was addressed to, but it was certainly a letter. Its contents were very vague not really referencing to who it was really addressed to, but it was no less full of praise and salutations. And then, I finally found it referencing meâ€| as a pet, as proof that some people are not really fit for anything. About the only praise I got was for the fact I ran away, an action that while it saved the lives of my brother, myself, and not to mention Thuggory, I could almost feel a slight vitriolic sentiment in those words.

And maybe, they were right. Toothless was clearly the crowd favorite and he was not as obviously cursed in the eyes of Vikings. He was better trained to fight than I was, having been given his whole life to learn skills and techniques. Sure, most of them didn't exactly carry over as well to the human body, but what little that did probably eclipsed everything I knew of swordplay or anything at all a dozen times over. Besides, how am I supposed to be the Chief's son

when I was stuck as a dragon? In fact, my being being a dragon probably smoothed things out even more; I had a legitimate excuse to give him the right to lead Berk! I was never cut out to be anything like my father anyways!

But first I should let my little brother know about this, tell him that he should be the Heir, because it was clear to me and everyone else he would be the better Chief. "Uh, Toothless," I called to him.

"Hey, Hiccup!" my brother said, chewing on a bite of apple. He sounded enthusiastic and the grin on his face was positively beaming. "These letters, they're all praising me."

"Uh, yeah, quite a lot of them are," I replied.

"It's amazing!" he said. "I never thought..."

"Thought what?"

"It's just that ever since I hurt you." He was talking of course of the time he struck an arrow in my gut that nearly killed me, I forgave him about that, mostly since kinda shot him first when we met. Still, my brother's words had become a little somber, a little tense, his mood considerable darkening. "I thought, maybe I wasn't cut out, capable of doing anything good..."

That sounded very familiar. "But I always believed in you," I told him, probably more than I believed in myself.

"I know. But now, lots of other people believe in me, too." Toothless's grin resurfaced. "Say, I bet that you must have got plenty of letters yourself, bud! They're probably talking about how fast or how brave you were for standing up to the Whispering Death."

I looked back at the letters piled around us, wondering if I was doing the right thing here. For quite a while, Toothless had been feeling down, especially ever since One Eye given a proper funeral. This was the first time, in a long while I ever seen him this happy. While I was technically going boosting Toothless ego even more by letting him know that he would make a good Chief, if I let him know about the nature of some of the letters I've read, I don't think he would take it very well. Given the fact he's optimistic about what I got, he might have skipped over or not even noticed the things written about me or the lack of things written to me. One thing was certain, I did not want to ruin this moment for him, he deserved that much.

"Yeah, there's this one talking about how much of a runner I was, bud," I said. I was being truthful, only omitting how the writer compared me to a coward.

"Mind if I see it?" Toothless said, excitedly.

"Uh, no," I needed to avoid the topic, get us on to doing something else. My solution was provided for me by Thuggory, just before he left. "We don't have much the time for that now; we have to go to the Library, don't we, bud?"

"Oh, alright," said Toothless. "I've never been to one beforeâ€¦. though, I'm not exactly too keen on meeting someone called the Hairy Scary Librarian."

"Don't worry about itâ€¦ I'm sure we'll be fine." The Hairy Scary Librarian had been known to cut up intruders to the Meathead Public Library using special swords he called 'Heartslicers'. Needless to say, he was a terror of any would-be thieves and vandals; not the kind of person you wanted to talk to on a regular basis. Hopefully, being allowed in, invited by the Heir of the Tribe, gave us special protection in case things gone awry.

I got up, ending my stint as a living sofa cushion. Toothless had a little trouble standing up from the floor, so I had grab onto my neck so he could pull himself upward. My brother's steps were also a little uneven, a little shake, enough for him to almost trip. Fortunately, I was there to catch him before he fell and provided the little support he needed. He didn't need to worry, not when I was there by his side.

Maybe I am not cut out to be a Chief, but I don't think that mattered right now. I was Toothless's older brother and I was good at that; I will be there for him.

We stepped out the door, ready to face today.

* * *

><p>Those of you who knew Medieval medicine will know what happened to Toothless. It's pretty nasty what they had to do in an age without morphine. I haven't said what they did to Toothless, but you can all probably guess.

Also, try not to make too much sense out of dream logic.

6. Chapter 6

**Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. **

Side story time, this time a little short, but this came a lot sooner than I thought it would have. Also, this will be the last side story chapter for this story arc, so I hope you enjoy it.

I'm thankful to CAN07 for continuing to provide Art. An updated pic has been posted on Becoming the Enemy, if anyone hasn't seen the picture, I encourage looking at it.

See you next time.

* * *

><p>I didn't want this life. If it were up to me, I would never have become joined the Knighthood, let alone become a Squire. It was all at the urging of my eldest grandparent, the Patriarch of my Brood, that I was admitted in and rose through the ranks as I did. Ever since the Night Fury, er, Toothless as he called himself now, aspired to join a Flight, I had been pressured to follow after him.<p>

Most of my Kin accuse me of being a slacker, citing that I did not deserve to earn the promotions I had been given, and I agreed with them. Where others, those far more deserving than I, had to struggle to enter the Knighthood, it was simply given to me. And rightfully so, I was taken captive and might have died after the disaster that was my second actual assignment.

Now, my Patriarch was no more and I had no idea what to do with myself without him. All I could do now was be subordinate to the one who my life was forfeit to. And because of that, I served the Herd while spending half my time as one of them—half of that time napping in a corner somewhere.

Were it my choice, I would have been content to live quietly as a nameless nobody. Had it been my decision to make, I would never have joined the Knighthood, let alone get myself captured or have become one of the Herd as a consequence; my life would certainly be less confusing and less frustrating, but it's never my choice, nothing ever is.

At the very least, my liege's den was comfortable. It was dry and well heated, provided there was enough wood to keep the flame in the center going. I lounged by the fireplace, letting my side, most especially my wings take in the warmth. They needed it, especially after last night's little fiasco—

"Oh, come on, Hookfang," said my liege, a creature that could only really be described as a being that was somewhere between Herd and Kin. He had the horns of my Breed, along with a snout very similar in shape to mine, yet his forelimbs were something somewhere between legs and wings, but with very flexible paws. And all of these features were on a body with size and proportions more suited for the Herd. Truth be told, he appeared rather—unsettling when I first saw him, but my life was now in his talons. "We've got a big day ahead of us!" he told me.

"But I am hurt, my liege," I replied showing him my wing. There were bite marks all over, none too sharp or major to actual puncture or cause any permanent damage, but it was still there.

"Pain is for wimps!" he told me. "Besides, Gustav was just playing you! Some wingman you are!"

I frowned. Last night, I ended up getting a new—student courtesy of the Nadder. It was youth, well, by Herd standards at the very least. According to the Gronckle, Kin age faster than the Herd during first few years of life before it evened. As a result, even though my new student appeared to be a fledgeling to my eyes, he was slightly older than me.

Foolishly, I thought that maybe I could do a little play fighting, the kind of thing male his age would engage in since he was the only one of his age group around the island. I found out the hard way that my large size turned out to be my undoing as I was simply unable to reach the smaller Kin while he eagerly bit and nibbled on every part of my body he could get to. My liege only just sat back and laughed at my predicament and only ended it once the smaller Nightmare tired. That little monster was a real nightmare. "Why did the Nadder send him?"

My liege, understanding what I said, only shrugged. "I don't know, but you gotta admit, the kid's got spunk!"

Too much, if he asked me. I think I had enough for today _and_ _tomorrow._ "Can we just stay in the den today?" Today, us, _actual_ Kin received a day off from teaching those. I would have wanted to spend the time just lounging and relaxing, but I knew that was being far too hopeful.

"No, we can't!" denied my liege, as much as I wanted him not to. "Come on! The twins want to go race us on Barf and Belch!"

"Oh, is that all?" Well, at least he wasn't thinking of something involving a certain Nadder's tutor and Host; that would have ended worse. Of course, knowing him, this might be part of a large ploy for that female's attentions. Still, I would be going up against the Zippleback in a race. I know they actually became Squires because they earned it and that definitely put me at a serious disadvantageâ€| though, maybe it wouldn't be too bad to spend time with them. I got up, lazily. It was my liege's will, so I must comply to it, right? Besides, even if I doubted I could win, it's not like I was guaranteed to win anyways.

"Atta boy, Hookfang! We're going to show those four just how great we are!" said my liege as he lead me out the entrance to his den. As soon as he closed off the entrance, he climbed on top of my backâ€| one day, I wonder if I will ever get onto of his.

I didn't fly us to our destination, the trip to the den the Zippleback and their hosts shared was not that far away. A few hours after dawn was a good time for a leisurely walkâ€| because I needed something to make up for the fact I can't leisurely lay down. Besides, I could actually show my face in public without any unwanted attention. For whatever reason, Herd females wereâ€|attracted towards me, which is odd because I'm not exactly the most popular male in my class. Now though, I didn't have to worry all too much about them, most did not really seem all too much interested or recognize me in my true form.

Sometimes, it feels strange to walk through a Herd nest, village, without being ousted, but then again, they believed I was one of them, a male of their own suffering from some strange curse like some of their own. At the same time, realizing the sounds my former captors made were actual speech gave me chills, especially once I started to understand this so-called 'Norse' tongue of theirs; there were just so many words for things...

I will admit, the best part of this whole experience is probably the fact that to most people, I was a complete. No one here, save my former peers knew who I was. I never have to worry about them thinking I only got to where I was due to blood relations and nepotism, nor did I have to worry about being judged as a reflection of my grandfather's whims; I just only wish he did not have to perish because of it. As far as they knew, I was merely a boy, an adolescent who knows a thing or two about the Kin and sometimes dawned the shape of a Monstrous Nightmare and on one occasion stood against a vicious, murderous false Kin. And I was completely fine with that.

I walked through the market without attracting too much attention, other from the occasional glance or wandering stare. I passed by

false Kin as they frequented the stores and tried to barter in tongues they could not speak only exchanging minor greetings. The only things I received were nods and salutations and good greetings, not frowns, not scornâ€|

But, I knew it wasn't too good to last. Halfway through the stroll through the village, I began hearing my liege mutter to himself. "It's okay, Snotlout, you can do thisâ€| you can totally do this."

"Is something wrong my liege?" I asked, somewhat concerned. Sometimes, whenever we were in public, especially when we were around people, my liege begin would talking to himself, always seeming to try to reinforce himself over something.

"No, nothing's wrong!" my liege told me. " Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Butâ€| you sounded worried a moment agoâ€|"

"I wasn't worrying!" My liege denied. He then jumped ontop of my head and then looked me in the eyes, just as "Worrying is for chumps! And I'm not a chump! Are you worried?" And just like every time before, my liege denied it was a problem.

"I am worried," I admitted. Somethingâ€| bothered my liege I did not know what it was. Why was he so concerned over something?

"Well, then, maybe you're not cutout to be my wingman then!" chided my liege. While, I don't understand what flying has to do with this, I somehow felt a shiver run up my spine. He reallyâ€| didn't want me?

"But my leige, I don't understand why do you speak to yourself? It's strange!"

"Who's talking to himself?" questioned my liege, again denying me. "I do-" Suddenly, my leige stopped speaking mid-sentence. He didn't leave me, I could still feel his weight on my neck, but something had interrupted himâ€|

Quietly, I stopped and turned my head around to see my liege. I found him looking at one of those brass discs that shone one's reflection, like a murky river but with a cleaner image. I felt his weight leave my shoulders and soon I saw my liege solemnly approach the diskâ€| I wonder what it tasted like, certainly it must have been better than iron.

Was that what got my master's attention, his own reflection? No, that can't be it; that was silly, he was no Nadder. With one hand, I saw him feel around his face, a look that reminded me that he was afraid, worried about something about his face. "It can't end like this," I heard him murmur. "A whole village and you're the only freak in itâ€|"

"I don't think you're a freak," I told himâ€| I don't know why I did it, but, I just thought it was what was expected of me. As long as I knew him, my liege looked like this.

My liege turned and looked at me. "Pft, says the guy who attracts all

the ladiesâ€¦" chided my liege. "Look at me, I'm the only guy on Berk who looksâ€¦ like a monster." Now I began to understand. Slowly, I approached him, knowing what bothered my liege. On all of 'Berk', there were only two who shared a similar fate, but both of them were better adjusted, more suited. One of them was with the Nadder and aside from a few areas by the neck and her inability to speak as the Herd did, she was fine. The other was the Night Fury's brother and he no longer had to worry about slowly becoming Kin. Unlike the other two, my liege was caught directly in between, torn between two vastly different forms and appearing unsightly because of it. Sure, there were times he liked to proudly declare that only the greatest could be Monstrous Nightmares, but maybe that's all they were, declarations; I'm certainly not all that great, either.

"Then, what are you going to do?" I asked, concerned that my liege might make an irrational decision.

"I'm- I don't knowâ€¦" he declared, slumping down on the floor. "I justâ€¦ don't want to be a monster, a freak. That's allâ€¦"

"Then, why don't you?" I questioned. Shaking my head, an idea popped in my head, maybe something that could solve my liege's worrying. "You could always become a Nightmareâ€¦" While, I am not too proud of my involvement with the Night Fury's elder brother, I did know that he seemed pretty well off from my point of view. Aside from that, my liege would beâ€¦ my Kin then.

My liege seemed to consider it for a moment, a slight a frown on his face. "Dad wouldn't like that," he chuckled morbid. "I mean, he got mad the moment I started growing horns andâ€¦if I suddenly decided become a Nightmare, he might just..." He shook his head and changed the topic "Hey, Hookfang, I have a question."

"Uh, yes?"

"If Iâ€¦ No matter, what happens you would have my back, right? I mean, you're here because you want to, right?"

That was an interesting question. What if my liege was not my liege, would I still wish to follow him? I only began serving him because I was so afraid to die by his hands, he had the right to end me and then showed me mercyâ€¦ I owed him. If I didn't, I would have flown off long agoâ€¦But then again, it wasn't all bad. I had plenty food, a place to sleepâ€¦ a shoulder to cry onâ€¦ all of those things were given to me by him. But, would I still stay with him without them? My answer came to me, I simply relayed it, "â€¦ I am your wingman."

"Then, you're the best wingman a guy can ask for, Hookfang!" cheered my liege. He then took me by the head and gently scratched at the back of my horns. It was a soothing feeling, one that carried with it a few realizations.

All this time, I thought when he referred to me as his wingman, I thought he was talking about in the sense that we flew together, even though he was bound to the land. No, that was something else entirely, something unrelated to merely flight. I had his back and he had mineâ€¦

Second was that no matter how much I thought of him as my liege, my

liege did not see me as his vassal, at least, not all of the time. There were plenty of times, like right now, where he was perfectly willing to forgo any pretense of service between the two of us.

Third, maybe I should start being more active with my opinions, be more assertive. Before, I just followed whatever was the task was assigned to me. But now, my liege asked me for my advice, my opinion on certain things, and I had feeling that in the future there. What if I had to refuse him something? Maybe, I could, no, I should be willing to oppose him if he thought of something foolish and maybe everytime he decides to cut time from the afternoon naps.

While I stood there thinking, I suddenly felt my liege, no, Snotlout climb on top of my back. "Well that's enough of that!" he declared. "We've got a race to win!"

I silently nodded. Yes, there was a 'we'. I led us forward. I wonder if the prize for winning would be a place to sleep on.

* * *

><p>You'd think that with both Hiccup and Toothless gone for a while, things would be rather quiet. No, I don't dislike my apprentices by any means, but whenever something crazy happens, they're usually involved or even the source of the madness. Because of them, I now live in a world where the Chief's eldest son is a dragon, his other long-lost son used to be a dragon, a Nadder comes to my shop to buy a sword, a Gronckle quizzes me on blacksmithing techniques, and that's not counting the other villagers. I still don't know what happened to Val, but neither of the two boys are willing to say it; I reckon it's gotta be for a good reason.

There's a reason that the Chief and I often spent more time than we used to exchanging a drink by a flagon. We thought we'd seen everything, done plenty enough in our lifetimes. Turns out, we haven't had dragons all over Berk, both by birth and by conversion, come and live in the place; it makes me wonder why people have such a hard time believing in a dragon wearing bones for armor.

Still, I thought that having Stoick's boys off the island would give me a little bit of a vacation, some time to relax without having to worry about something else going horribly wrong. Of course I would have, if did not I completely forgotten about how destructive Snotlout and the twins were with their new friends. They were the number one reason not to have kids.

"Can any of you lot tell me what you just done?" I asked the present group of teenagers and two dragons. We were all on the docks, standing by the smolder remnants of what had once been an old longboat. Yes, I already knew it was ravaged by dragon fire because Snotlout and the twins decided to 'borrow' the thing for the purposes of a little race of theirs; I just wanted to make sure they knew.

"Ooh! Ooh! I know this one!" declared Tuffnut.

"No, you don't, you idiot!" argued his sister, Ruffnut. "Ain't that right, Barf?"

The Zippleback head behind the girl gave an approving nod while the other made a comment in turn.

"Well, you heard Belch! I know this!" argued Tuffnut.

I decided to intervene before I _completely _lost control of the situation, as things often do around the twins. "So then what's the answer?"

Tuffnut cheerily declared. "That we were _awesome!"_

Ruffnut merely snorted at her brother. "I could have told you that!"

Barf and Belch nodded, apparently agreeing with her.

"Well, you didn't!" yelled Tuffnut.

The pair of Zippleback heads also nodded, apparently agreeing him..

"Whose side are you on!?" questioned Tuffnut, apparently, his frustration directed at the Zippleback.

"Yeah, are you on my side or his?" added Ruffnut. If it were anyone else, I would have thought it was odd for the twins to band together to argue against a common foe, but the Zippleback was a unique case. Both heads, Barf and Belch, seemed to more or lessâ€¦ get how the twins functioned, or tried to at any rate, at least enough that they justâ€¦ fit right in.

The pair of heads only just looked at each other with confused glances and then nodded their heads. What any of this meant was something that was just beyond me but whatever it was seemed to cause a sort of verbal debate among the four of them. Four heads better than two? Not so much.

Washing my hands of that silliness, I turned to Snotlout and Hookfang. The duo gave each other a quick look of anticipation. I took a sip from the tankard mounted on my arm, the first of what might be many today. "Alright, can you tell me what happened here?" I could tell Snotlout and the Nightmare both cringed slightly, backing away. So that's how it was? Fine, if they won't tell, I'll just have to beat it out of them. Taking off my mug, I quickly replaced the axe attachment for my arm. Now, I wasn't going to cut off their heads or anything, but that doesn't mean I can't try to scare it out of them. "Tell me before Iâ€¦"

I didn't even get a chance to finish my sentence before Hookfang, burst into a rapid fit of growls and grunts, each growing more fearful and rapid with every saying. Eventually, Hookfang stopped speaking, only to start panting and breathing heavily."

"Wow, that's an earful," Snotlout commented.

"And I did not understand a single word of it!" I told declare. "Next time, maybe you should think about that before you let Hiccup borrow those necklaces of yours." The Nightmare's head dropped onto the ground right after, realizing what he said was in vain. Though, I wished I understood what he said, I had never been a dragon, in part

or in whol, nor did I wish to become one just to understand a few words. Still, I had to give the Nightmare credit, saved me the trouble of having to actually swing my arm around.

"Soâ€| uh, what now?" asked Snotlout, fearfully.

I considered it for a moment. Well, I got an explanation, one that I couldn't understand, so technically, I got what I wantedâ€| but what was the fun in _not _making the kids wet themselves? Besides, I can do so much more with a little creativity. I raised my axe, a little close to Snotlout's head. Understandly, the boy cringed his teeth, feeling somewhat uncomfortable. He might have been really tough and quick to heal, but that did not make him unafraid. "Oh, nothing," I said. "Just thinking on letting Stoickâ€| or your father decide your punishment. Property damage doesn't fix or pay for itself you know.."

"We'll fix it! Rebuild it!" yelled Shootout. The axe really does work wonders, don't it?

Satisfied, I took my axe off and then placed a box of tools near the boys feet. "Excellent! You may begin work immediately!"

Snotlout nodded and with some hesitation, so did Hookfang and the Zippleback. Unfortunately, the twins did not seem to be as pleased. "Aw, I wanted to set Snotlout on fire today!" complained Ruffnut.

"Yeah," added Tuffnut. "What else am I going to do today?" Really, am I surprised they're talking about setting Snotlout on fire? I'm pretty sure they used to do it more often when they were younger.

"You can help Snotlout and Hookfang rebuild since you're responsible for flooding the house with Zippleback gas before it exploded," I told them, much of their chagrin.

"Hey! That was them!" Tuffnut gestured at Barf and Belch, both heads of the Zippleback obviously replying with a snarl. "Well, it was cool, but not _that _cool!"

"Well, I'll be checking on back within the hour. You better have something ready when I return!" I told them. Then, I turned my back on them and walked away. Realistically, I doubted any of them had the skills and expertise to actually finish or even start rebuilding a burnt down house. These were the twins and Snotlout, after all; I'd sooner expect Hiccup or Toothless to kill Jormungandr, than for any of them to build anything above a shanty. Still, if they tried hard enough, maybe I can cut them some slack.

Taking my leave, I decided to go off back to my workshop. Some nice relaxing smithing might be all I needed to unwind. It turns out that while I was away from my forge, someone else came by, specifically, a blonde and a redhead.

Astrid and Stormfly both approached me as I came forward, each giving waves of greeting. "If you're here about that sword, I haven't even started on that yet," I told them.

"Uh, no, it's not that," said Stormfly.

"Oh. So, what brings you to my store today?"

"We're here to ask forâ€¦" started Stormfly. She appeared a little hesitant, unsure of what to ask for. She then turned to ask Astrid to help her. "Are we really sure about this? I mean, you do know this place makes me feelâ€¦"

I saw the shield-maiden give a small nod and mutter something unintelligible. Speaking whatever language the dragons spoke apparently only required you to have the area near your throatâ€¦ change a little, now if only, speaking other languages were that simple.

"Very well," said the redhead, sounding a littleâ€¦ defeated if you asked me. "Astrid and I need replacement shields and throwing axes since we-" she frowned. "-broke all the ones we had."

I shrugged. Oh, really, was that it? I knew they were training, so it's expected weapons and gear would dull or break eventually. Replacement and repairs were as simple as going to the local smiths and craftsmen, it shouldn't have been a problem to consider going unless money was a concern.

Astrid though broke out in a fit of giggles, causing the redhead to glower. "It's not my fault I fell back on what I knew!" she said to the blonde. "You're supposed to break the shield the most direct way, as fast as possible. It just so happened I had the weapons you gave meâ€¦" Astrid continued laughing. So, she's been taught in the art of breaking shields? That explains why both the _axes and_ shields both needed replacing at the same time. Axes just tended to dull more often than break.

Leading the two girls into my store, I showed them to the shield rack and took out a few spare axes. "Well, I've got quite a few of both, so take what you feel like..." It was at this point, I realized that while Astrid stepped in, Stormfly did not. Was she really so embarrassed about breaking some gear? I mean, she broke a few shields in a single day, most people would be bragging about that sort of thing. "Is something wrong, lass?" I asked her.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at allâ€¦" Stormfly finally stepped in. She was clearly shivering a little, but did not comment on that. I was her go over to the collection of axes I laid out, while Astrid went over to check by the shields.

She seemed anxious to get near the weapons, but got over enough to touch the blade of one of the axes. "Take your time," I told the red head.

"You makeâ€¦ dragon killing weapons, do you not?" he asked, hesitantly.

I smiled a little. Well, technically, any weapon could fell one of the beasties, I liked to think mine were better designed for the job, being sharper and more able to punch through scale and thick hide. "Yup, the finest you'llâ€¦" Before I added the word 'find', I suddenly remembered who I was talking to. Really, the name should have given it away, that kind of thing isn't a name.

Stormfly was a Nadder, a Nadder who currently appeared human because of the amulet around her neck and I completely forgot about that. It's strange to think about it; I don't think of her as a dragon, because more often than not I see her dressed up in the best clothes Astrid could give her. What makes this awkward is that I made a killing, a business, off of creating weapons to fight her kind. I think I need to get my tankard attachment again.

"So how much will that be?" asked the Nadder. She still hesitated, but seemed a little calmer now.

Blinking, I found Astrid and Stormfly approach, each carrying a variety of equipment.

"Eh, don't worry about it. It's on me, you girls have plenty training to do you!" I told them. Both looked at each other, somewhat confused, I know I am.

"Hm, so this is what it's like to have connections?" muttered Stormfly.

"Sort of," I replied. She must have been thinking, I was playing favorites because she was friends with Astrid and Hiccup, for the longest time, had been trying to get her the Hofferson family's attention. Well, I was playing favorites, but not for that reason.

Both girls nodded and went on their way, taking what they had selected with them.

With them gone, I slumped down into a chair, realizing with a heavy heart just what the future might hold for me.

The war between dragons and Vikings might suddenly end, despite running for centuries. Now, I know it's unrealistic to assume for it all to end overnight, but it could happen; stranger things have happened. Every day I see Vikings and dragons living together, to say nothing about the dragons who were Vikings. Sure, I imagine that dragons will still try to fight and attack my Tribe every now and again, but the full scale raids that happened almost as if on schedule might never happen again.

I made my place in this world offering the things I made to fight and kill dragons, but if dragons attacks become less frequent and less dangerous, my ability to sell my weapons would decrease as well.

In fact, if after the war ended and dragons come and decide to live on Berk, I just might find myself suddenly ostracized for the things I used to create en mass. And even if I could, I don't think I would have the conscience to keep making dragon killing weapons if they started suddenly being our neighbors. For all I know, I might be responsible for allowing someone Stormfly or any of the other actual dragons on Berk to lose someone they knew!

I just don't know what I would do without the war. Creating was my life, my livelihood. If I wanted to continue making things for a living, what would I have to make to stay in this job?

Maybe Hiccup's idea might be more helpful than I thought it was.

I went to one of the tables and unfolded a sheet of parchment. It detailed an idea Hiccup had, something that might allow us regular folk to live with dragons at least better, at least without doing something crazy like becoming a dragon. It took me a few days to figure out what he wanted, especially since he couldn't talk to me directly about it, but eventually we settled on something and had a basic prototype worked out in time for the trip to Meathead Island.

I wonder if Hiccup will ever get the chance to show it off in front of Mogadon, though I'm more interested in how Toothless would react to it.

I grinned a little to myself. The world was becoming a different place, one that if I wanted to place in, I needed to adapt.

* * *

><p>Now, I am aware Brood means in the same birthing and all, I simply use it because it's the closest I could **think of to represent the unorthodox and heavily informal clan system dragons would use. **

**Yes, I know that Hookfang is a lot more resistant to Snotlout in the movies and series, but I've got an interesting idea for how to handle his character. **

He's also a littleâ€|scatterbrained, randomly jumping to something unrelated.

Also, can anyone guess what Gobber and Hiccup made?

7. Chapter 7

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

So, I'm doing pretty well these days. I'd like to thank Thor-born and CAN07 for being a big help in that regard. Lots of people came in this month. This chapter come out far earlier than I expected, a good three days earlier than my usual.

As to you other readers, we now finally continue the saga of what happens to a certain pair of brothers.

Please enjoy.

* * *

><p>My legs hurt, no doubt about it. Every time I so much as twitched the wrong way, I received a jolt of pain so intense that I wondered why I was even able to stand, let alone walkâ€| Okay, maybe I'm giving myself too much credit, I'm just barely hobbling forward and it's only because my brother was letting my grip onto his neck I'm even able to do anything. Most of the time, I have to keep it off the ground for the moment I put any of my weight on my leg was the moment it erupted in burning pain.<p>

And probably the only thing that hurt worse than my leg was the

splintering headache. I don't know what the Meathead healers did to me, but I had a feeling I would have probably been better off just having the spine still in my leg. Every now and again, I had short dizzy spells where my vision would get cloud and I felt like throwing up. It's just like with that mead-stuff that my brother and Dad liked to drink every now and again, I could never take more than a swig before feeling like I would just keel over. Isn't the point of having a healer to make you feel better?

Still, I kept moving forward, one limping step at a time. "Maybe I should let you on my back," suggested my brother.

"No!" I opposed. There was no way I was going to let him make me ride him at a time this. I mean, sure I've accepted letting him fly me, but that's flying; I can't do that without wings! I wanted to be able to stand on my own two feet not on his four! Besides, at the rate I was going, I could make it down the steps far enough for brother to get out of the doorway within three minutes?

Hiccup stayed silent, but I could almost swear Hiccup's eye roll with every step I took. Before long, I managed to make it all the way down the small flight of stone steps and onto the ground; I felt a little proud for making it that far without yelping in agony, but Hiccup seemed a little less than enthusiastic, "Well, if we hurry up, we can be there by tomorrow."

"Shut up!" I told him, only to realize that I didn't know where I was supposed to go. "Uh... where is the Library?"

"Don't worry, I know where to go," said my brother as he lead the way.

I walked a little faster now that I got the hang of 'walking' with only one working foot. I decided to stop watching my own feet once I realized that I was practically tripling the amount of time it took for me to do each and every step; I figured since my brother was there and all, I could risk it. The pain in my head and leg were at least starting to dull... or maybe I was starting to dull.

As I hobbled slowly onward, I noticed that the Meathead village was not really very much different than what it was like back home. Now that I was not being rushed into fighting some dragon, I could easily pick out and recognize the different stores and houses and houses that acted as stores and the other way around. Buildings were mostly made of wood, a liability in the event of a dragon attack, but it was pretty cheap and easy to work with. Really, the only thing that really stood out to me being different is that occasionally, I keep seeing the Meathead's insignia in places where I commonly expected the Hooligan's. Overall, the place seemed quite familiar to me and I had an inkling suspicion there was more to it than just similar architectural choices. It that was probably nothing.

"Is that him?" I heard one of the villagers say.

"Yeah, it's him! Who else has a Night Fury?" another said.

Snapping myself back to reality, I noticed that several of the Meatheads had took note of me and my brother... which to be fair is pretty easy to do when your brother is a several ton dragon.

The villagers then started calling other villagers to their side, their number practically doubling every time my brother and I so much as stepped forward. Others instead went over to us, forming an ever growing _cloud_ of bodies that eventually stopped us from advancing ever further. I clung on tightly to my brother, expecting the worst to happen.

Then, to my surprise, the villagers then raised their arms up and broke out into cheers and applause. "All hail, Toothless, slayer of Grimmaw!" was the loudest and most noticeable of them, followed by other accolades like "Good shooting!" and "Your father must really be proud of you!"

I was honestly expecting a little hostility or maybe some indifference, I mean, just because I received a pile of letters did not actually mean that _everyone_ was willing to accept me, to congratulate me for what I had done. For all I knew at the time, that could have just represented a very vocal minority, one that was willing to secretly give me a little support while I rested. I have never been as glad as I was to know wrong I was.

I let go of my brother, feeling a sense of overwhelming pride. Suddenly, the pain in my leg and head seemed almost like nothing in comparison. The gathered Meatheads began chanting my name, raising their hands and any weapons in the air in what I imagined to be a sort of congratulatory ritual. I had done good, hadn't I? Didn't I deserve this satisfaction and adoration? I grinned taking in their praise.

"What was it like vanquishing the beast?" asked one man.

I thought of that for a moment. Now, I realize that all I did was hit the Whispering Death in the eye, but then again Thuggory said there has been no sign of him since yesterday. Whispering Deaths lack limbs, a serious disadvantage when trying to clean wounds. On top of that, I hit the eye, one of few points on their body susceptible to damage. I realize I might have caused more damage to the dragon than I realized and it was entirely possible that while I did not immediately leave a fatal blow, the Whispering Death might have simply bled out. Still, I knew how to reply, "It was the most terrifying moment of my lifeâ€¦"

"You're brave for a boy!" another man spoke.

"Wish I had a son like you!" said one of the women.

Never in my whole life have I ever received this much universal praise. Even in the King's Nest, I had many who criticized me for being 'born into my position' and others who compared me to Mother, but this was different. I could stand here forever, drinking upon the praise.

"Uh, Toothless," I heard my brother say. "I hate to break it to you, but have to go nowâ€¦"

Right, we have to go to the Library. Turning to him, I whispered, "Aw, but can't we stay for a little longer?"

"Toothlessâ€¦" he said in an almost parental tone of reprimand. I hated it back when Mother used it and I hated it even now. Always put

such a damper on my mood.

I almost wanted to say he was being selfish. "Fine!" Turning to the crowd, I raise my hand to get their attention. The conversation I had with my brother seemed to go over their heads as they still continue to shout praises in my name. "Okay, I wish stick around I've gotta get going!" I told them. "I've got some real important business at the Library, do you all mind letting me through?"

As soon as I said that, the crowd shifted, backing away just enough to form a path for a small scra-, no, a lean and well built boy like myself and a dragon to easily walk through. Smirking at myself for my own cleverness, my brother and I walked down the path the shouting throng set out for us.

Eventually, the villagers tired and slowly backed off, one by one; they couldn't keep shouting their praises and applause going on forever, as much as I wanted them to do so, that or they probably got tired of me hobbling along. As soon as they left, the pain in my leg returned. On the bright side, my head at least felt a little clearer now, whatever the healers did to me seemed to have worn off.

Now that were mostly on our own, I felt it was time again to discuss with my older brother. "Hey, you've been awfully quiet," I told Hiccup.

"Because you clearly needed me to talk over a hundred Vikings shouting your name," he told me in that tone of sarcasm of his.

I smirked. "Well, can't you believe it? I actually had people cheering me on!" I saw my brother's face contort into a small frown, well, what passed for one on a dragon's face. I wondered what that was all about, did my sudden growth of popularity bother him somehow. "Uh, is something wrong?"

Hiccup's face slow contorted back into a more neutral expression. "Oh, it's just nothing!"

"Hiccup!" I groaned. I knew he was obviously lying to me.

"It's just!" he began, nervous. I could tell he was contemplating what he was going to say, his eyes moving back and forth. "I was worried back there!"

"Of what?"

"The healers were unsure if they could save you," said my brother. "I'm just glad you're okay."

I cringed a little, yeah, that was definitely something worth worrying about, even now. I mean, he told me this before like! an hour ago? But I guess it might have needed stating again. "Well, so am I; I'm glad I am alive, bud!"

Hiccup grinned.

"Boys! Hey boys!" I heard a man shout.

Turning in the direction it was coming from, Hiccup and I saw a man rapidly approach.

Hiccup and I stopped moving for a moment, giving the man to catch up. On closer inspection, I could tell it was one of those men that often to report to my Dad, Mulch I think it was. The Viking man stopped once he got within arm's reach, bending over exhausted. He gave deep breaths and inhales, trying to fill his lungs with air. "Just got wordâ€¦" he panted. "That youâ€¦ boys justâ€¦ woke upâ€¦"

"Hey, slow down!" I told him, letting Mulch gather his breath.

"Mind translating for me?" Hiccup asked. I nodded and started repeating my brother's words for Mulch to hear. "Hey, Mulch. Has anything come up?" Neither of us really felt like bending down and reaching into the dirt right now. Really, it would have been nice if Hiccup could just talk to other people directly, but that's just how it was. Dragons and humans can't talk to each other without having been one of the other at least once.

Mulch at this time gathered enough of his breath to at least sound normal. "No, just giving you the morningâ€¦ afternoon update," groaned the still exhausted Viking.

"Alright," said my brother. "Tell me."

"Okay, did plenty of trading, especially after word spread that Toothless felled Grimmway." I smirked at that statement, now Dad was certainly going to be proud of me. I bested the thing that had bothered me for so much of my life without even being there and now it seemed like everything was only getting better ever since I put him out of my misery.

"Anyways," continued Mulch, "after that, Mogadon upheld his part of the bargain and stuffed as many of the ships as he could with raw iron and wood."

Hiccup and I both blinked, both of us vaguely remembering that we did force the Meathead Chief to a bargain. I think in between me nearly dying to some medical treatment and the adoration of my new fans, we both forgot about it entirely.

"Well, that's good, Dad would like the sound of that," Hiccup said; I merely relayed his words since I was still too stunned to actually do that little thing that we humans like to call thinking.

"And after that, since we couldn't do anything more without overloading the ships, a couple of men ventured into the village onâ€¦ errands or whatever while waiting for you boys to recover. I think Bucket went to see an old friend of his."

My brother nodded. "That's fine," he told the man. I think Dad might have reprimanded him for leaving his post, but honestly, Hiccup was not our father.

"So what are your orders?" asked the Viking. Hiccup, being the eldest, was put in charge of leadng a small trade fleetâ€¦ if you consider three ships a fleet. Mulch was technically the supervisor, but Hiccup didn't seem to need all too much of it.

"Well, as soon as the ships are ready, I want you all to deliver the supplies back to my Dad. Toothless and I will stay behind a little

longer."

"Behind?" exclaimed Mulch. "Your father gave explicit orders for me to make sure you return home safely! Once he knows about the incidentâ€¦ down there with that _thing, _he'll- !"

I decided to interject. "He's gone!" I said. "Grimmaw, the Whispering Death, whatever we call him. He is dead, because I killed him! Nothing to worry about!"

"Hopefully," Hiccup muttered, putting a slight damper on my mood. "We haven't seen him for a day and suddenly everyone thinks he's gone for good!"

I snorted. "Name one good reason for why I should believe that he's still alive."

"Because Mom has been dead nearly fifteen years?" stated Hiccup.

I could only glower because I knew he had a point; Mother had been thought dead for so long that when I told my Father that she was alive that he didn't believe me until I gave him something of hers. "Well, he's still lost an eye, I don't think he can treat the injury without hands."

"True," brother admitted before turning back to Mulch again. I immediately began translating again, "If you or Dad are worried, just return back and pick us up. Otherwise, I can just fly us home."

The older Viking nodded, understanding. "So what aboutâ€¦ you know that thing you brought over?"

"Leave it here," said my brother. "I'll take it home if you guys don't come back."

I frowned. When Hiccup and I left Berk, he had a large box of some sort with him, something that he and Gobber had been working on for a while. Now, I had never been allowed to know what was inside, with either my teacher or my brother saying it's some sort of surprise. I no idea what it could be, but at the same time, I had to wonder. I knew was made of leather, but to imagine something so big it took up that big crate, yet could be carried by my brother on the way home almost seemed impossible. Still, why wasn't I not allowed to know what it was? Did they not trust me?

The older man nodded. "Alright," he said begrudgingly. "Have fun at the library." And then Mulch was gone.

Thinking to myself, I wondered what would Dad think of all this. As far as my Father knew, this was officially the first time that I, acting as his son, had done a great deed in the Honor of the Tribe. I ended the life of a monster that terrorized the lives of many Vikingsâ€¦ and two particular dragons, and won great rewards. Would he be proud me? Then again, what of 'Grimmaw'? I know now he used to be a Hooligan after all, what would his family and friends think of him, and me, once they learned the truth?

Suddenly, I felt my weight shift as something from beneath me come right at me and hoist me into the air. It was Hiccup, using his neck to leverage me onto his back. I tumbled slightly, before landing on

chest. "Hey! What are you doing?" I shouted.

"What's it look like? I'm getting us there before dinner!" And then my brother was off. Once again, my brother decided that I needed to be carried around everywhere. So much for being a great and terrible slayer of dragons; I'm not even allowed to walk anywhere! Sometimes, I get the idea that my older brother sees me as â€| his little brother.

* * *

><p>After I had forced Toothless onto my back, travelling to the Meathead Public Library was much faster without having to worry about my hobbling little brother. I know that he hated me a little every time I put him on top of my back and carried him wherever I went, but this time I had good reason. My brother was injured and no matter how much either of us wanted to deny it, he was not okay.

As much as I wanted to have him recover quickly to stand up on his own again, that didn't happen. He was definitely having problems walking, almost tripping on his own feet or stepping in something he wasn't supposed to. The Meathead Public Library was far, far enough away that it might have not been the wisest idea for him to walk the whole distance. So I did what I thought was right, I gave him a little time to walk on his own before I carried him the rest of the way there.

We arrived at the Meathead Public Library far sooner than I expected, the building itself being at the farthest edge of Meathead village, past even the farms and fields. I had actually been here before once before, two years ago on a short visit for my technically 'fourth' birthday. Granted, back then, it didn't occur to me that calling this place the 'Meathead Public Library' was a bit odd.

Despite its name, the whole did not appear to be all that 'public'. There was a column of guards standing outside of the main gate, their weapons drawn and ready to cut down any would-be visitors at a moment's notice. I could see some marksmen a bit further and on the roof, their bows aiming right at me. Well, I can't say I didn't get a warm welcome.

Really, now that I thought about it, I didn't think Meathead Public Library looked much like a library either; the whole building appeared to be more like a fortress with all the assorted entrapments, a few banners here, a few spikes there. Then again, I never exactly seen many other libraries this large either. Now, there were a few libraries on Berk, but those were small, private collections of maybe consisting a few stocked bookshelves run and operated by individuals or small families. The Meathead Public Library on the other hand was put together and effectively run by the whole Tribe of Meatheads. Oh, so that's explains why it's public; well, it still does not look like a Library to me.

I cautiously approached the Library, fearing that one wrong move might set off the guards. Toothless's arms gripped tightly around my neck and I could feel my little brother shiver as I slowly approached. A few men dressed in armor with concealing helmets approached me, their weapons drawn and pointed at us.

"That's enough, they're our guests!" called a voice from behind the

Meathead warriors. It was Thuggory, living up to his promise of meeting us at the Library. On his command, the Vikings sheathed their weapons and went back to their posts as if nothing at all had happened.

"You know, I thought this place was public!" yelled my brother as Thuggory came into view.

"It's owned by the whole Tribe, that makes it public to the Tribe," said the Meathead Heir, more or less confirming the things I had been thinking about a moment ago. Shaking his head, Thuggory continued, "Anyways, I'm glad the two of you could make it here; I can start working on paying you two back for the help you've been giving me."

"Good thing, too," laughed my brother. "Otherwise, you'd have to suddenly find out that Hiccup's your long-lost brother to get out of debt to him!"

The Meathead Heir broke out into a short belly laugh. "Well, don't thank me yet," said Thuggory as he lead us to the front of the Library. "The Hairy Scary Librarian isn't exactly the nicest guy in the bunch. Cuts up anyone who isn't a Meathead or has the Chief's explicit permission if they so much as think of getting close to the Library."

"Uh, why exactly is he called the Hairy Scary Librarian?" asked my brother, sounding a little afraid. I could tell he was shivering or maybe that was just me. I there was a draft, right?

"Because all of those things apply," muttered Thuggory. We now stood outside a pair of utterly large double doors, the kind Father said are used to allow men to charge out of the building as one big unit. They were big, massive enough that I imagined three monstrous Nightmares could enter, side by side. "Anyways, just stick by me and I'll lead you both to him."

My brother and I both nodded and Thuggory lead us inside.

Immediately inside, I could see what must have been hundreds of bookshelves, all filled to the brim with books and scrolls. Shelves, organized in an almost dizzying labyrinthine manner, contained dozens upon dozens of subjects and topics all neatly organized and filed. They even had a copy of the Book of Dragons by Bork the Bold. Last time I went here, Fishlegs had been begging me to take him and it's not hard to see why. All told, maybe if all of the books on Berk were put together in a single place, we might have cobbled together somewhere under a fifth of what the Meatheads had.

And then there were the other things. While it's to be expected that any large and sufficiently old build developed a collection of decorations and memorabilia, I almost got the impression that the building was made just as much for these things as much as it was for the books. I saw a collection of wooden masks, their faces colored into almost angry visages depicting gods I had never even heard of. A pair of long tusks, their tips capped in gold were hung over the pelt for what must have been an abnormally long necked horse. There was a statue of a man by one corner, dressed in armor and painted in the most gaudy and disorienting colors imaginable standing right next to

a golden state of a bald, robed man meditating and making odd gestures with his hands while holding beads. We Vikings traveled to far off lands all the time, but we rarely ever take home things so large. One day when Thuggory succeeds his father, I should tell him to rename this place the Meathead Public _Museum._

"How do you keep all this stuff?" commented my brother. "How is it a dragon hasn't come by and destroyed it all?"

Thuggory's face contorted into a wry smile, obviously proud of his Tribe's collection. "Well, one of my ancestors had had the bright idea of putting most of our valuable and difficult to replace thing in a single place, far out of the way of any food or anything else a dragon might want. Usually, dragons usually don't even bother wasting their time coming here, there's nothing to gain! Well, most of the time, a few months back, half the dragons in the raid just suddenly decide to go ransack the place, including a Night Fury! We beat them off, but I don't even know why they bothered doing that; that act pretty much cost them the raid."

I could almost _feel _my brother cringe. "Well, that Night Fury musta' thought he was trying to destroy a siege tower or something and the others just simply decided to follow him...Probably came to regret it." There was obviously a small degree of guilt on his part.

Okay, this conversation a little awkward Thuggory began squinting at Toothless, as if he was trying to figure something out important. If he found out that Toothless had been the reason the Meathead Public Library almost burned down, I don't know what I'd expect. I decided now would be a good time to change topics to something a little less likely to make an enemy out of one of the few people who actually respected me. I casually tapped Thuggory with my tail, silently reminding them that I was a _Night Fury_ and of what happened last time I showed up.

"Maybe Night Furies just like to messup libraries. No wonder you turned into one, Hiccup," Thuggory jokingly suggested. My brother simply shrugged, not getting the small inside joke that I had with the Meathead Heir. I hoped I didn't have to.

After that, we continued forward, turning a down a few more corridors and twisted shelves. I couldn't help but feel a little cramped; the ceiling was just low enough to feel uncomfortable and each corridor was tight enough that I risked knocking something over if I didn't carefully control my tail.

Eventually, we made our way to the clearing in what I presumed to be the heart of the Meathead Public Library. The area was wider, enough to comfortably fit in a few tables and chairs with enough room to spare for an overly clumsy a dragon.

Sitting at one of the tables was an elderly man, reading from a certain Night Fury scaled book. "So, you have arrived, _Hiccup,_" spat the Hairy Scary Librarian. His voice was so bitter that I could almost feel my lips pucker up from the sound of it alone. He very much didn't like me; he made that clear last time I visited.

"Hello, again," I told him, even though he couldn't understand. "Toothless, I'm going to need you to speak to him for me."

My brother was startled and fell off my back in surprise. He got up, mostly uninjured but with a look of distaste in his mouth. "Do I really have to?" he exclaimed. Like me, he too did not want to interact

"There's nothing to write on, you have to talk to him on my behalf," I told my brother. I've made some headway in using my paws to draw things on paper using a pen strapped to my finger, but that was still far too cumbersome to really count on.

"You are the worst brother ever," said Toothless. I knew he was bit half-hearted about it, but at the same time, I feared he might have been right; I had to make it up to him someday.

The Hairy Scary Librarian put the book in his hands down, letting me see for the first time in the long time. While few knew his real name, everyone knew him by a title that very accurately described all you needed to know about him. He was 'hairy' because his thick white beard was so long that he use it scrub his own feet. He was 'scary' because he was a powerful sword fighter known for brutally cutting trespassers into his domain. He was a 'librarian' because that was simply his job. In my case, I tend to focus on the word 'scary' over the other two, that was more important. "Pft, you're lucky that the Chief's boy has taken a liking to you, otherwise I'd have cut you open!"

"Hey, we're not doing that! We owe Hiccup and his brother plenty for what they've done for us recently," Thuggory said. "Now, have you learned anything?" I am so glad that he was on my side; none of this would have been possible if I didn't have him for an ally.

The Hairy Scary Librarian grumbled something under his breath, likely a complaint levied at his future Chief. He also took a moment to glare at my brother, making a cautiously take a step back. Most likely he hated my brother just from his association with me alone. Then, put my book down on the table. "No," he said flatly. "This isn't my area of expertise!"

"But you're a socrerer aren't you?" commented Thuggory.

"A little, yes, but I am a Flash master, a swordsman first and foremost!" said the Librarian. "I do not create items of power, boy; I know how to kill!"

"Then what do you know?" I asked and Toothless relay my question for me. If I still had the ability to sweat, I think I would have drenched the floor by now. I was nervous, but did my best to keep reign myself in. This was my only lead to fixing this whole mess and now it feels out that even Thuggory's aid was not enough. I needed answers, I needed something to hope for.

The Hairy Scary Librarian turned back to the table. Aside from the book, there were a few other items on the table; a burned black cloak almost reminiscent of dragon scale despite being made of cloth, a bundle of silver tipped rune inscribed arrows, two silver amulets, one of them broken. Yesterday when Toothless was being treated by the healers, I gave Thuggory the items for the Hairy Scary Librarian for examination. Each had some sort of magical effect and I hoped the Librarian could explain to me how they all worked. "In all of the

items you have given me, it is clear to me that they are empowered and operate using the basic principles of rune work," he said. I felt my heart beat increasing.

"I suppose if it my Chief wills it, I can find you some a treastie as well instructions on that practice. Aside from that, I can also translate the Latin in your book into Norse, but I am unable to do anything else beyond that."

"Really?" my brother commented.

"Only because it gets you out of my sight," spat the Librarian.

"Well, you hear that, Hiccup?" asked Thuggory. "You're gonna be learning how to make runes!"

I nodded. My brother and I exchanged big grins on our faces, each of us feeling like we accomplished a major victory. Sure, I thought we could get some answers directly from an expert, but a good book sounded just as good, if not better. Even better, now we were promised the chance to be able to understand the Latin parts of the book without having to do something crazy and tedious like manually translating the book ourselves or learn a second language, er, third language. We both felt like we were powerful Vikings champion winning a major victory on some major war.

"There is however bothers me," said the Hairy Scary Librarian, breaking me and my brother from our brief celebrations.

"Is something wrong?" my brother and I asked at the same time. Neither of us wanted things to go wrong, especially not now.

"Not neccersarily," replied the Hairy Scary Librarian. We still worried. "It is just thatâ€¦I understand that both of you are able to create these arrows, right?"

"Uh, yeah, is that a problem?" Toothless asked.

"No, not really," said the Librarian. "It is just that, even in foreign arts such as Hermetism or Alchemcy, a least one or two years of study and practice are required before an initiate can even begin to use the simplest spells and incantations."

"What are you getting at?" Toothless suddenly had a sneaking suspicion that.

The Librarian went over to the table and picked up one of the silver tipped, rune inscribed arrows. "This is not simple. This is far too complicated and requires quite a great deal more investment than the average apprentice would have."

I just sat there, stunned. Over the past few months, I've been asking some of my friends to try their hand at creating something, anything from the book's list of things. I wanted to know why was it that everyone else was seemingly disallowed from using any of the arcane knowledge I had in my posession. All my brother and I did was follow the directions before us and then something out of the ordinary happened, but that never happens to anyone else except for Snotlout.

But now, I learned that there should have been some practice or training before hand, some orientation and education to get us to use magic. Yet none of us needed that, all we needed was the ability to read some Norse and the ingredients on hand. Why were we exempt from needing training? What made us so different?

At the same time, I felt a deep rumbling. Maybe it was a bad idea to skip breakfast altogether, but I was anxious about finally getting some answers. I guess now that I've been given some answers and new questions, I could take my brother out for a bite to eat. Maybe we could celebrate with some of his favorite, just so I can make up for earlierâ€¦

"Hey, do you hear that?" asked Thuggory, interrupting my chain of thought.

Now that he pointed it out, I did hear something and it wasn't my own stomach...

"Uh oh," I heard Toothless utter.

The rumbling gradually intensified, growing stronger as the source of the noise drew closer.

From one of the corridors, stone began to buckle as an invisible force from underneath rapidly approach the center of the room.

I had a vague idea of what it was and I quickly forced my brother onto my back, this time he did not protest in the least.. I wish I had what Gobber and I had spent the better part of a week working, but now was not the time to regret that.

The force, once it reached the center of the room, began eating away at the stone floor underneath it, forming a large pit. And from there, emerged the face of the Whispering Death. "You should have killed me! Let me die." The arrow that Toothless had stuck him with had been removed somehow, leaving behind a nasty, scarified ball of meat that had once been an eye ball. Surprisingly, there was also no trace of blood on his face, maybe he dunked it into the ocean or some river somewhere. "You will regret sparing me!"

"Grimmaw is still alive?" Thuggory shouted, almost surprised. He drew his sword out, even though it wasn't much help last time.

Hairy Scary Librarian drew two rune encrusted blades, his Heartslicers. "I told you it was too early to celebrate!" he shouted.

I felt my body lean forward, my muscles began tighten as I prepared myself. As much as I wanted to make peace with the dragon earlier, I knew now that the chances of that working out were slim; I had no choice but to fight or run. A part of me really wish my brother made him to bleed out like all the villagers claimed he did, but Whispering Deaths are known to be some of the toughest dragons for a reason. I readied to fight.

Toothless clung tightly to my neck.

* * *

><p>Vikings traveled ridiculously far. In both the books and the TV series, we have people going to the Americas or sailing around the world (repeatedly). This reflects what they have done in real life, often going to places their contemporaries never dreamed of. Can anyone guess what each item Hiccup listed out came from?

****I've incorporated that in order to make this version of the Meathead Public Library, because the source material was a little nonsensical.****

8. Chapter 8

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****One Point of View this time, it'll be clear who it belongs to momentarily. I will say, this chapter was satisfying to write, though I will warn that there's issues.****

****I want to know what you guys think about this, about what parts in this specific chapter reallyâ€¦ got to you.****

****Please enjoy.****

* * *

><p>I wish I had my invention. Okay, technically, it was Gobber's but I came up with the idea and had him put into paperâ€¦ and had him get the ingredientsâ€¦ and actually make itâ€¦ Okay, right, not human, no hands, but hey, it was still my idea.<p>

And that idea would have been really handy to have every time I wanted to avoid something, like right nowâ€¦ I turned a corner and ran as fast as I could. Behind me, I could hear the sound of something, many somethings impacting against the wood and paper of the bookshelves and their contents. A barrage of spines, I think. That sound was then followed by a heavy crashing as something utterly massive ran through the shelf, the spine's owner.

"Hiccup!" I heard my brother cry, his hands just clamped tightly enough around my neck to prevent him from falling over from my harsh turns.

"Sorry, bud!" I yelled. "I'm getting us out of here!" I had to go as fast possible, the Whispering Death was catching up to me and my brother.

"Stand and face me coward!" the Whispering Death cried. As much as I knew that I had to fight him, I knew that doing so in a place like the inside of the Meathead Public Library left me too much of a disadvantage. Night Furies are not the strongest or toughest dragons and I just can't compete with a Whispering Death in those categories, that was just the simple fact. Couple that with the lack of freedom of movement and I was just asking to die.

For others, that problem wasn't nearly as bad; the Hairy Scary Librarian was the fastest man I had ever seen alive. He was seemingly

everywhere, able to appear even in the most impossible, no, improbable conditions. No matter how fast or how far away the Whispering Death and I went, the Hairy Scary Librarian always somehow managed to find a way to appear directly in front of me every time I thought we managed to lose him entirely. Then half would just slash the Whispering Death with his twin swords, his Heartslicers, or he'd just stare at me, as if expecting me to do something. Either way, he kept appearing again and again. It's no wonder the Bog Burglars could never steal a book from the Meathead Public Library, not when they had a protector like him! I was really glad that he was on my side. Maybe I should apologize for the last time!

For a moment, I imagined how much easier it would have been if the Whispering Death had actually died by my brother's hands yesterday, but no, I can't really expect the gods or the universe to be easy on me. Which I am glad for, because I certainly relished the challenge and didn't mind at all about risking life and limb; it would have been too boring if all I had to do today was go to Library and check out a few books and get some translation work done. I mean, really, things were so dull earlier, the worst I had to put up with is people thinking I was Toothless's gallant steed or just his pet! Sometimes, I really wonder if every one might be right and I am actually cursed! beyond being a dragon, that is.

Taking a quick turn and listening to probably the rashest idea I had all day, I ran through a bookshelf, toppling it over; I cheered internally when I saw the main door, the way out within reach. Thuggory or his dad might get upset at me, but I think I'd rather have them chew me out or try chopping my head off later over getting skewered by hardened spines now! I just hoped Thuggory could catch up.

I dodged another volley and this time, I quickly turned around and sent a sphere of condensed plasma at my attacker. The Whispering Death staggered, the blow slightly knocking the wind out of him. Dragons might be near impervious to the fire of their relatives, but even then, the sheer force of a Night Fury's blast, of my blast, was still fairly effective.

Turning my back to main door, I was about to blast the door open, but then I found the Hairy Scary Librarian standing right in front of it. "You are on your own, boy!" he spat at me, clearly upset that I toppled over his charges. It was then I realized I lost what was possibly my most powerful ally!

I only glowered at him, my words being completely lost by him anyways. He walked off, now content to leave me to make fate now that he had the excuse he needed to stop aiding me. Great, good job Hiccup, you sure know how to make friends; all because of something you did two years ago!

Using what time I had left, I blasted the door open, much to the startled surprise of the guards outside. "Sorry!" I told them as I ran past them. They would have drawn their spears and swords at me, but I was too quick and they had a more important enemy to deal with.

"That's Grimmaw!" shouted one man. "He's alive!"

Unfortunately, I saw the Whispering Death plowed through them, not

even so much as giving them an afterthought even when they struck at him or fired volleys of arrows. He really wanted Toothless dead, but I wasn't going to let him.

I took to the skies, the wheatfields of Meathead island under my wings. Night Furies were faster in the air than any other kind dragon and I took advantage of that. Meanwhile, the Whispering Death chased after me, awkwardly and barely able to fly with his damaged wing. I felt lucky; uptil now, he seemed unable to blast fire or shoot spines at me, maybe being barely able to flying took too much of his attention.

If I really wanted to, I knew I could fly circles around him, but I knew I could never risk that. Toothless was still on my back, shivering and fearful. As it was, my brother was just barely able to hold on to me. If I flew too fast, I just knew that my brother would have worse problems than a bad leg. "What are we going to do?" my brother whimpered. But at the same time, I can't have him on my back, not with that dragon so determined to kill him.

I made up my mind, I had to get the dragon as far away from Toothless as I could. "Something crazy," I told my brother, because this plan might just be the death of me and him.

I dove straight towards the Meathead village, the Whispering Death just barely able to keep up with me. If Thuggory or Mogadon would feel insulted by my act of plowing through a bookshelf, then they'll think I had gone mad.

The first thing I did as I entered the Meathead village was to fly parallel and close to one of the many dirt roads that any typical village had. The villagers of the Meathead Tribe ran in startled panic once they had realized that a dragons overhead, duking it out. I scanned around, looking for the right props to set my plan into motion, but it was hard with all of the noise and distraction the village folk provided.

Eventually, I found my objective, a tall tower, similar to the familiar siege towers on Berk, was just ahead of me close by the docks. I flew toward it, my brother screaming in my ears, "He's gaining on us!"

The Whispering Death lunged at me, performing a boost of speed I hadn't realized he could do. Maybe he wasn't as injured as I thought he was, but that didn't matter. I darted out of the way and returned fire, twice, stunning him briefly enough to pull myself ahead.

As I neared the siege tower, I felt nervous, thinking that my plan would fail. One wrong move and Toothless would be dead. I shook my head. No, not the time for that sort of thing. I took a closer at the tower, noting it seemed unmanned. Good, then the damage would be strictly located to buildings.

The Whispering Death screamed in anguished frustration, "You will not get away this time!" He dove at me wildly, his maw open, threatening to swallow me whole.

I was waiting for him to do that. A Night Fury's blast, while potent enough to down most other dragons, only just barely stunned the Whispering Death; several tons of stone and wood on the other

handâ€|

Angling my neck just right, I blasted the side of the tower just right front of the Whispering Death's flight path, sending a good chunk of the tower in a roaring avalanche. A Whispering Death might have had the strongest armor among dragons, but that was no use. He disappeared, caught in my attack, but I knew better than to think he was gone.

My brother cheered, as if we had been victorious. "Take that!" But his mood darkened considerably once I started flying towards the ocean, just above the waves. "Waitâ€| where are you going?

"Keeping you safe," I simply replied. Then, I turned upside down. Toothless, still holding onto my neck, dangled.

I actually expected he would scream, but instead he just said in a calm, collected tone, "You are so meanâ€|" And then his grip slipped and he fell into Meathead Harbor.

I can't honestly say I didn't want to throw my brother into the harbor at some point, but I would have wanted to do that in situation when we were _not _facing mortal perilâ€|Oh, Thor... Is this how the twins think? Oh, I really hope Toothless doesn't drown, did Dad or I ever give him swimming lessons? Human swimming lessons?

Returning myself to an upright flying position, I flew back over to the Meathead seige tower. The Whispering Death burst out from the pile of rubble, his spinning maw crushing thick rocks into a fine, sandy mass. "Night Fury!" he bellowed and went straight for me.

Turning around and heading for the opposite direction, I thought for a moment of how well my plan was working so far. After distracting him and then dumping off Toothless, he still followed me, probably thinking my little brother was still riding me. While I don't really know too much about how a Whispering Death's eyes worked, I did know that losing an eye might not be all that good for your vision. At the same time, I probably had Toothless's scent coated all over me, while his own scent was now being covered up by the ocean. My little brother was in no danger, now all I had to do was lure him back to Thuggory or run him into a group of Meatheadsâ€|

And then, suddenly, I felt a jolt of pain at the back of my tail. I quickly lost my balance and suddenly lost control. I fell onto the Meathead docks, sending frightened and previously unaware dockworkers and sailors scattering in every direction. The irony of crashing into a pier was not lost on me.

I flexed my tail over to my head, assessing the damage. My left tail fin was gone, sheared off violent, leaving a bloody mess at the base of my tail. A sudden, cold fear crept into my thoughts. For a moment, I thought I would never fly again, but then again, I thought I wouldn't walk again either.

I turned and looked at the approaching dragon, his still functioning eye managing to glare at me despite being pale while. "Downed means dead," he spat in a cruel, twisted echo of a saying Gobber would have said. He then sniffed the air, searching for what must have been Toothless scent. "Where is he?" he said in a cold tone.

I put my tail away and stood on all fours, readying myself for inevitable. I couldn't fly, not like this. My tailfin was damaged and I did not think I had enough time for a new one to regrow. There did not appear to be any other Meathead warriors or even just normal villager, so I was now on my own. I was stuck on the ground, forced to fight or die, with no backup against a superior foe. At least Toothless was not going to be seeing me go to Valhalla. "He's gone," I growled him, an actual threatening sound like what I would have thought a dog or really big cat could do. "You have to go through me first!"

"So, be it!" The Whispering Death lunged at me, once more, his gapping maw leading the charge. I sidestepped out of the way, letting my charge run smack-dab into a post.

I blasted him, point-blank with a sphere of condensed plasma. He recoiled, dazed for a moment.

Annoyed and confused, he lashed his tail at me, but I twisted my body around and used my tail to deflect his. For a moment, I imagined I was swinging a sword, parrying my opponent with my blade. Because Night Furies did not have weapons on their tails like some dragons such as Gronckles did, Toothless had once told me that we used ours as an emergency defense.

I backed away from my opponent as he recovered from my plasma blast. After my defeat yesterday, I learned that I had to keep moving; the Whispering Death could overpower me in a straight up melee and that I had better odds if I keep landing cheap shots whenever I could.

Then, before I realized it, the Whispering Death fired a volley of spikes at me. They struck my left foreleg, just barely missing my chest. The pain rocketed up my former arm, causing me to grit my teeth to hold back my own yelling. I saw that the Whispering Death seemed pleased with himself, as if he enjoyed inflicting me my pain. "Are you strong enough, _freak_?" he spat.

Taking advantage of my moment of weakness, he targeted my other foreleg with his spinning teeth. He knocked me down onto my back and lunged me. I just barely avoid having him eat my foreleg off by keeping his mouth pried open with all of my limbs forcing his jaws wide open, but that came at a cost. To prevent the loss of one limb, the Whispering Death's spinning teeth tore into my paws, making me feel like I was slowly being put into a meatgrinder.

It was just like yesterday; I was pinned by the Whispering Death and he wanted nothing more than to eat me alive. I was scared of what might happen when my strength inevitably failed me, of what he would do to me if I even thought of trying to go out of his grip. I didn't know what awaited me if I died. Would I be accepted into Odin's Hall despite my being a dragon or would I just suffer a different fate?

No, I couldn't think that; I had to live, I had to go home. I swallowed my fear and worry down my throat as I prepared one last, desperate attack. I gathered all of my remaining Breath, building it up in the center of my throat. Then, I let it go, letting it slam into the Whispering Death's face.

My ears popped and my vision was blinded by the intense light. It took a few seconds for the dizzy, spinning feeling in my skull to wind down. Opening my eyes, I saw that the Whispering Death was blown back a dozen feet off of me, stopped only when he ran crashing through a nearby wall.

Feeling exhausted, I pulled out the spines stuck in my foreleg with my teeth and began licking off my wounds. Was it over?

Of course not. The Whispering Death, taking just a little bit longer to recover, slithered out of the damaged building. His face was bloodied, mostly around the nostrils and where his damaged eye was. The sheer force of my plasma blast must have hurt him quite badly. Then, he laughed at me, positively thrilled. "More!" he demanded. "Fight me more! You wounded me!"

Before he could lunge at me, dozens of Meatheads started pouring in, throwing whatever weapons they had against the dragon. "Take down Grimmaw! For the Meatheads!" yelled one man.

"Meaningless trash!" the Whispering Death yelled as he battled the advancing wave of Vikings. "You warriors are not worthy!"

While the Meatheads were off fighting the dragon, I caught my breath. I felt so exhausted, so weary that I felt like I could collapse if I went even further. I gave him my best shot and all I managed to do was bloody him. Odin might know if he must be the toughest Whispering Death ever, because I had no other explanation.

Looking at my paws, I noted that they mostly healed, the majority of the damage having faded away, the small chunks of cut up or missing flesh patching themselves up. My tailfin was still missing, but I could tell the bleeding stopped. Really, I felt like this was my only advantage against the Whispering Death and all it did mean that all I could really do was keep standing in his way.

So I decided to just that, because I clearly didn't learn my lesson. And people think I never took all that much after my father.

"Hey! Over here!" I taunted.

The Whispering Death was just about to bite through a man's body, but he tossed him aside, leaving the frightened man to scurry for his life. The rest of the Meatheads followed soon afterward, they didn't have a prayer. The Whispering Death seemed pleased to see me. "So you have the will to fight?" he asked.

I gritted my teeth in a fake smile. "Oh, I just like fighting," I lied. "Dad, can't keep me away from my training!" I was exhausted and I almost slipped on my leg as I stepped forward, but I knew I had to keep it up. Maybe I could trick him into thinking I had more fight left in me, make him think I had enough force to beat him handily and scale him off. "That blast I did," I said with a wry grin. "I can do more, so you better run!"

The Whispering Death then gave me the closest thing he could manage to a smile with a round mouth and rows of teeth. It was frightening. "Excellent!" he declared. "Maybe you can finally end me!"

Let me die a Hero's Death! In Honor and Glory!" Suddenly, I understood what he wanted. Why he agitated a whole village, why he had been threatening my brother and mother, and why he looked so intently at facing me. He wanted to die. Why? I don't know, that's all that mattered.

Suddenly, my plan to scare him off didn't seem like it was going to work.

I immediately came to regret my bluff when the Whispering Death came at me yet again, with more ferocity and speed than he had shown before. I kept stepping back, narrowly avoiding every lunge, only for the dragon to quickly coil up and then launch another attack.

Yet I knew I was only delaying what was inevitable. I could only evade or take whatever he gave; I had no chance to attack. The Whispering came at me from every direction, never giving me the time I needed to catch my breath or draw in my Breath. I was wearing down quickly, each step back I took made the next one harder and harder to pull off.

The only reason I was still even standing now because of that rush warriors talked about in when in life or death situations and even that feeling was starting to get dull.

I needed to do something. Taking a leap of faith, I quickly slapped the Whispering Death with my tail, aggitating his bad eye enough to disorient him. He staggered slightly and I needed to advantage of that.

Then I don't know what came over me. In the back of my head, I was planning yet another retreat, another escape to catch my breath so I could continue fightingâ€¦ Instead, I did something very different: I rammed into him, tackling him onto the ground and pinning him flat on his back, the reverse of pretty much the usual situation.

My teeth were extended and I began to violently try taking bites at the other dragon's head, sometimes managing to draw blood. Meanwhile, my limbs flailed violently, the claws scratching the limbless dragon as he struggled to escape.

I have no idea how long the Whispering Death was at my mercy, but eventually he managed to escape when he bloodied my face with a cheap jab. "You would have made a fine warrior!" he cheered once he was free. We both circled each other, standing a fair distance away, ready, mostly ready to go at it again.

He looked like a mess, not like I was not much better. There were a couple dozen welts and scratches everywhere on each of us, most of them minor, but each had small goblets of drop dripping forth.

With the rush of emotions and what must have beenâ€¦ instinct fading away, I suddenly started feeling terrible again. My limbs hurt from all the scratches I took when I was standing atop the Whispering Death's spiny body. Aside from that, I knew I was quickly approaching my limit. My body might have been able to quickly recover from injuries, but that did not mean I was going for last much longer.

And then, someone else approached us. He was a tall man, with a

blonde beard and an odd helmet. Blinking away the weariness, I realized he wasn't wearing a helmet so much as a metallicâ€¦ Wait, was that Bucket? I wanted to roar out a shout to ward him off, but all that came out was a half-hearted, half-exhausted whimpering noise. I held my breath. There was plenty of Vikings who were seriously hurt today, but I had a sinking feeling he would be the first casualty under my command; it would be _my fault _ he got hurt.

To my stunned surprise and the surprise of any Meatheads who were close enough to watch, the Whispering Death slithered _away from the _approaching Viking. "Stay away!" he growled in a tone that would have been clear to anyone, regardless of language.

But to Bucket, he didn't seem to notice or even care that he was approaching a dangerous man eater. The Whispering Death kept grumbling and backing away, seemingly afraid to approach this man.

As he drew closer, Bucket pulled out something from his vest, a glass jar filled with some sort of yellowish substance and a wooden spoon. Removing the lid, he took the spoon plunged it in and pulled it out, taking a small chunk of the yellowy goop from the jar, honey, I think. Then, he took the spoon of honey and raised it towards the Whispering Death.

In response, the dragon backed away, as if the spoon was the most dangerous sword imaginable. "You don't belong here!" he cursed.

"You've got a lot more cuts since the last time I've seen youâ€¦" said Bucket. The Whispering Death just stood frozen, seemingly terrified as the Viking man took the spoonful and placed it over the dragon's bleeding face.

I saw the Whispering Death give an almostâ€¦ mournful look. "Leave meâ€¦" he said, but this time, it was only a whimper, like he was not really sure if he wanted Bucket gone.

Bucket didn't seem to care. He then took out a cloth rag and began mopping up the blood all over the dragon's face. Meanwhile, he began rubbing the honey over the wounds. I vaguely remembered that honey was a great way to seal up bleeding, because the sap hardened and trapped blood.

Me and a couple dozen Meathead warriors just stood there, trying to understand what we were seeing. The Whispering Death as far as we knew was a crazed dragon, to see him... like this seemed almost dream like, unreal. Why was he still? Just why was Bucket able to stop him from fighting? I tried that and that got Toothless sent to the healer's hut.

Then, I recalled the dreams I've been having recently, the ones that shown me glimpses of the past, using some of Mom's memories. Now that I thought about it, wasn't there a man there who wanted to give a golden helmet to a friend of hisâ€¦ one that, now that I thought about it, sounded vaguely like Bucket?

"I'm not going to leave youâ€¦ you got hurt bad last time," said Bucket as he continued to treat the dragon's wounds. Come to think of

it, it was odd that the Whispering Death was missing the arrow Toothless lodged into his eye. Removing an arrow from anywhere was difficult, the arrow tips are usually designed in such a way to prevent them from just being pulled out without causing more damage; it would have been impossible without handsâ€¦ though, now I wonder if Bucket also got doctoring skills because of his head injury or even how he knew.

"I don't need your help," said the Whispering Death in a whisper.

On the tip of my tongue, a single name came to me, one that I couldn't really speak as a dragon. "Donnar," said Bucket in an almost parental, scolding tone. Maybe, I'm a little slow, but it's only now that I fully realized that the Whispering Death, the very dragon that my brother had been terrified of much of his life, had once been in my Mother's crew. I had it practically said to me a couple of times and it just didn't fully register until it was right in my face.

The Whispering Death, no, Donner, seemed to crumple into himself, almost ashamed. A sudden chill ran down my spine, a cold realization at how things might have turned out if things were different. This man had suffered probably the worst out of anyone who had been transformed. He didn't have arms, legsâ€¦ friends for maybe fourteen years. It's no wonder he wanted to die so badly; he wanted to go to Valhalla. I had a sinking feeling that if things happened differently, I might have been itching to go to Valhalla myselfâ€¦

Blinking, I looked at Donner again. He stopped struggling, almost accepting of Bucket's aid after having been forced into it. "You need to be more careful, you always get yourself hurt," Bucket said, as if this conversation happened a thousand times before.

For a moment, it was as if the Whispering Death seemedâ€¦ at peace, like, he just felt like everything was going to be alright. Maybe, I can end this without further bloodshed, maybe I can help this man.

I steeled myself and approached Donner. The Whispering Death's mood immediately changed into a growl and probably might have leapt at me if Bucket had not had his hand on the dragon's nose; it was if that single limb had all the strength it needed to hold back several tons of angry meat. "What do you want?" the dragon hissed.

"To help you!" I said in as calm and collected a tone as I could manageâ€¦. which probably involved me making an awkward face with all my teeth sticking out.

"Help?" Donner sneered. "What kind of help?" He was skeptical.

"You're not the only one who's cursed," I told him. "There plenty of others back home who've suffered just as bad!"

Donnar looked at Bucket, wanting to consider his friend's counsel, but he didn't respond. He spat and curse, his mood definitely souring when he realized that he couldn't speak to his old friend. "What are you getting at?" He clearly didn't trust me.

"I want to help you!" I said. Well, mostly out of pity. I'm a little angry at him for nearly killing my brother and probably ate a dozen

Meatheads... and more, but maybe he was just having a bad day, er, fourteen years.

Donnar seemed to consider me for a moment, as if he was weighing the options. He looked closely at Bucket, as the man kept putting more spoonfuls of honey on the dragon's face. I suddenly knew my way in, "You can spend more time with him! Don't you want to return home with him?"

The Whispering Death blinked. Yes, I had his attention now. "Maybeâ€¦" he stuttered, a look of what could only have been hope on his eyes.

"Hey, maybe, we can all go homeâ€¦" Bucket suggested, as if he came up with the idea himself. I felt like I must have had a beaming grin on my face. Things were going to be alright.

Which is why a split second later things went horribly wrong.

One moment, the Whispering Death was there, standing by his old friend with anticipation. The next, he was on the ground, an arrow imbedded into his side. He screamed at me, "You tricked me!"

Turning from where the arrow came from, I saw Thuggory brandishing a bow and a big grin. "We got him!"

"It was over!" I shouted at him, only to slap myself with my own tail when I realized he couldn't understand me.

Thuggory ran up towards me, tossing aside his bow in favor of a sword. The once stunned Meatheads warriors let him through, then surrounded us all, their shields raised as if we were still expecting a fight. Bucket tried to shield his down friend, and at the same time, I went to face Thuggory. "Good job!" the Meathead Heir shouted towards me.

I wanted to feel so angry at my so-called ally, but at the same time, could I really blame him? He might not have realized that I was about to settle a peace and thought we were still fighting. The dragon language is made up of calls that to most people sound more or less the same to most humans. 'IT WAS OVER!' I wrote to him in the dirt.

"Yeah, you're right!" agreed Thuggory, for all the wrong reasons. "Hey, why don't you handle the last blow? You're the one who fought Grimmaw the most!"

'HIS NAME IS 'DONNAR'!' I wrote in response.

Thuggory gave me a look, as if I told him a joke that he wasn't familiar with. I snorted, a puff of smoke coming out from my nostrils. It's time's like this that really make me wonder why it hasn't sunk in that any potential dragon could have once been human.

I was about to write something again, but then the Whispering Death's body began to shimmer and glow. A familiar, green fire erupted from the shaft of the arrowhead and engulfed the dragon. He screamed, as if he was burning through his flameproof scales.

'MY ARROWS?' I hastily scrawled. I wanted to write a full sentence, but I knew better than that.

Thuggory gave a wry smile, as if satisfied to watch a dragon burn. "Well, yeah, took them from the table and I had to find a bow, butâ€¦" His smile turned into an expression of shock.

Turning back to the burning Whispering Death, I could see that he hadâ€¦ shrunk, turning from a massive several ton dragon to a one ton Viking man. His features much the same as they were over a dozen years agoâ€¦ at least, that's what I originally thought before I realized that his entire body was covered in old faded scars and fresh wounds. His bad eye was still mostly a dead orb, but now, the injuries that were only scratches to him a Whispering Death now seemed to have become horrifically large welts from sword cuts. Yet, what baffled me the most was an old scar, the mark my Mom left on him when she defended Toothless nearly over a decade ago. Surprisingly, it became an injury the seemed like it came from a human rather than a Night Fury.

"Donnar?" asked Bucket, concerned for his friend.

Donnar choked a little, his voice sounded raspy as if he hadn't had anyone to speak to in an eternity. "I have handsâ€¦" He didn't seem to notice Bucket speak at all and instead, he began flexing and moving his newly returned arms. It seemed almost as if he forgot how limbs even worked since they practically moved all over the place.

Thuggory and his warriors just stood there, frozen and disbelieving. None of them expected a dragon to turn into a man; I certainly didn't back when I met Toothless. "Hiccupâ€¦" Thuggory slurred.

'LET ME HANDLE IT,' I wrote to him.

The Meathead Heir nodded in reply, probably still unsure of what's going on. "Alright. Stand back men!" he shouted at those under his command.

I approached the former Whispering Death a little closer. He seemed almost mesmerized that the curse upon him was finally broken, almost e was bursting withâ€¦ joy, pure and simple relief, not the sadistic pleasure he took when he fought me. Bucket shared the same emotion, wondering as if a long lost friend could return home. "Is it over?" he rasped, "Could I return home?"

I thought about that for a moment. I'd have to explain it to Thuggory and make some reparations here and there to the families that the Whispering Death ravaged, but overall, I don't think there'd be too much problem. The curse was lifted, maybe it'll be even easier to return him; I could almost say 'yes'. I blinked. Donner started yelping, as if he was in great pain.

I saw the man's now recently returned legs start to dissolve just before had to chance to ever use them. He started to gag as rows of sharp pointed teeth too big for his mouth started growing all the way to his tongue. The curse was reasserting itself, just like with Roland!

The Meatheads and I could only flinch away, unsettled and disgusted.

Thuggory, too, took a step back, but held his sword up just in case.

And then, the soon-to-be Whispering Death gurgled something, something that immediately me very, very unsure of what I should do. "Kill me!" Several men, including Thuggory, had their weapons drawn out, looks of pity and uncertainty on their faces. Most of them stayed put, but a few approached, considering for a moment if they wanted to respect the man's wishes.

For a moment, I thought that maybe I could do the most good by doing as he wanted, slaying him. But then, I realizedâ€¦ I couldn't do that. Now, it wasn't that I had no mean to kill with, I could have easily bit of his still mostly human head or roasted him alive using the small amount of Breath in my chest before either turned enough to make those things impractical. It's just, I couldn't bring myself to harm him; I didn't want to do that, not when he was at my mercy. "I want to help you! I don't want to kill you!" I shouted in response.

Donnar, still able to understand me, yelled back, "Then kill me! Kill me before I turn back!"

"No, I'm not! You don't have to die!"

"I have to! I don't want to spend the rest of my days as a beast!" Donnar's skin started hardening, turning into a dirty gray carapace. His injuries, the scratches I gave him mostly stayed the same size and shape, but their relative severity drastically decreased as the former Viking's body

"We aren't beasts!" I pleaded.

Donnar's still functioning eye, in the early stages of being with cataracts, narrowed on to me. "You're just like your mother," he said in nearly guttural Norse. "You two have contented yourselves to live as a Honorless monsters!"

Thuggory almost brought down his sword on the former Viking, but I glared at him just in the nick of time. He dropped his sword and stared at me as ifâ€¦ afraid. Maybe I must have been glaring hard or maybe he was listening carefully to the dragon's words.

Shaking my head, I turned back to the Whispering Death. I thought of his words for a moment and then made my reply. "Do you think your honor is intact?" I said in a cold yet angry tone. I wanted to help, but suddenly, I felt a little less sympathetic. Normally, I don't think I would have taken much offense of anyone saying I didn't have any much in the way of Honor or even Glory, but I just couldn't stand it when he brought up my Mom. I didn't really know her all that much but can anyone easily keep a straight face when someone you didn't know insulted your family? Something in me flared up.

The mostly-Whispering Death's maw clenched, still forming like clay was being reshaped. He looked at me, despite the fact his still functioning eye was almost completely milk white.

"I understand that life has been hard for you ever since you were separated from my Mom, but that doesn't mean you should kill yourself!"

"I must die!" Donnar said in guttural roars. He was far too dragon around his neck to speak Norse now. "I must be chosen!"

"Look around you!" I roared. Frightened villagers and cautious warriors who didn't know what else to do other than stand and watch gathered around. "Look at what you've done! You attacked these people and for what? To anger them enough to find someone able to face you in battle? Does that sound honorable to you?" As far as I knew, while the brave and powerful were often selected to go to Valhalla, being noble, honorable really improved your odds of getting in.

"But- Iâ€¦ I refuse to be one of thoseâ€¦ creatures! They attack our homes, you would neve-" Of course, he was talking about dragons.

To which a replied, "_My Kin_ have more honor than you." I told him, using the only words I knew he could understand. Of course, I wasn't talking about all dragons, but I had an idea I could at least call some like Meatlug or even Hookfang 'Kin' without it beingâ€¦ wrong.

The Whispering Death stopped struggling, stilled as if my words had trapped him in ice. I don't know what he was thinking, but I continued.

"I'm not going to kill you," I told him, my tone flatter, more restrained now that I got most of my resentment out of the way. "I'm giving you a choice, you can either let us help you or you can leave."

Bucket looked longingly at his friend as if he understood my ultimatum. He took a step forward, wanting to give the mostly-Whispering Death a reassuring touch.

But then, the mostly dragon-Viking turned and half-slithered and half-ran towards the ocean.

Thuggory gave an order for his men to stop him, but by then it was too late; Donnar had escaped into the sea, vanishing beneath the waves. Everyone could only stare out into the ocean.

Bucket wept buckets and almost as if on cue, white snowflakes fell upon the land. It almost felt like the sky itself felt the man's grief and poured down its own frozen tears.

Off to the side, I could see Toothless approach, escorted by Mulch and wearing a soggy looking towel. He approached me silently, giving me a frown. At least he was fine, if a little angry at me, though for what? Thuggory eyed my brother, appearing to consider him a little more intently than he ever had before.

Easing up, I just felt a little cold, a little weary, and very, very hungry. I just wanted to go back to bed or maybe feast on a barrel of tuna.

A couple of men, most of them unarmed villagers started cheering me on, saying that it was because of me that the Whispering Death was gone. I was a hero in their eyes, but I didn't feel like one.

I failed to save someone today.

* * *

><p>This, I feel like might be the saddest piece of fiction I wrote in a long while. While, I don't think it's a Greek tragedy bad, it clearly has several of the accosiated elements, such as major turning points in events denying what could have originally been a "good ending".

I've been feeling I haven't been giving Hiccup some major character development at least in relation to Toothless as of late. This is my way of making up for it.

9. Chapter 9

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Another chapter, this time, a little more traditional for my style.

Anyways, I got some new cover art for this story, again by CAN07, if you didn't know. Be sure to thank him too.

Hope you all enjoy this.

* * *

><p>A tail is a strange thing, it is always behind me, usually out of sight, yet it is still very much a part of me. I could order it to twist and turn about as well as I could coordinate any one of my legs. For me, it's not all that useful on the ground. Maybe it's because I grew up not having one, but I sometimes knock something off a table if I am not being overly careful, not that I fared much better without a tail. But for a Night Fury, a tail was practically essential, like a rudder to a ship, and mine was broken.<p>

I sat there in there, placing the end of my tail in a hearth. The fire didn't really do anything for me, but the warmth felt like it was rejuvenating the delicate membrane, which I felt like I needed a little extra of considering how badly I damage it. Earlier today, I ended up losing one side of my tailfin, an entire section just sheared off. If I had been a normal dragon, the injury would have crippled me for life, grounding me for potentially forever, but as my life kept constantly reminding me, I was anything but normal. The sheared off section of my tailfin was slowly regrowing, almost like a how I once saw how a damaged leaf slowly regrew. Right now, the smaller portion of my tail grew to about half the size of the undamaged side. At this rate, I could be ready to fly in no time.

Next to me, sat Toothless, dressed up in as many furs and buckskins as Bucket or Mulch could manage to find. He looked like a giant mound of carpets with a small head sticking out. He was huddling as close to the fire as he could without setting himself ablaze. His teeth clattered and rang, his shivering being so intense I thought his name might suddenly be more literal than I originally thought. "Howâ€| Doâ€| Youâ€| Dealâ€| Withâ€| This...COLD!?" he exclaimed, his mouth rattling.

I gave him a small smirk. Earlier, snow fell upon the Meathead island and now my brother was experiencing his first winter as just an ordinary boy, without fancy things like insulting scales or insides that always feel like warm campfire; I probably wouldn't have realized just how chilly it had been if it weren't for the blanket of white outside the building or the clattering of my little brother's teeth. "Just learn to endure it," I told him. Hopefully, he could learn to cope within the next few days, I mean, no one else seemed to having as bad as a reaction as him.

My brother gave me a look that probably would have been a little more serious if his teeth weren't shaking. "Your...Faultâ€¦" Earlier today, I dropped him into Meathead Harbor, just before the snow hit. He hadn't been there long, but afterwards, he started complaining about the cold, even though it had been several hours since Mulch pulled him out.

"Okay, fine, I'll admit that dropping you into an ice cold sea is a bad idea." I told him. "But look on the brightside, you still have all your toes."

"Thanksâ€¦" he groaned. "How...Long...Thisâ€¦Lasts?"

"The whole winter," I said, being a little nonchalant about it. To be fair, it should have been a little self-evident, right? I mean, even dragons had to know that. "Sometimes it lasts into early spring."

"The...Wholeâ€¦ Winterâ€¦" he said bitterly, as if he had been hoping for a different answer like, a 'week'.

"And it gets colder," I added, just to get on his nerves.

He snorted, "Greatâ€¦"

Then, I saw Toothless eye something at the edge of the room. It was a black cloak, hanging upon a coat rack. It was a gift from our missing grandfather, who everyone just called 'Old Wrinkly'. While I haven't seen him in years, my brother and I recently discovered that cloak in his house, hidden away in some underground section. When Toothless wore it, it turned back into a Night Fury. "You could always use it," I offered. "It'd certainly be warmerâ€¦" The cloak was damaged though; it only transformed Toothless part of the way ever since Alvin attacked Berk.

Toothless scowled, as if the idea suddenly didn't seem so appealing when I recommended it. "Iâ€¦ Willâ€¦Endure..." he shivered.

I sighed. Well, it was worth a try. Toothless had a problem putting it on, mostly because the last time he wore it, his old teacher died saving him. I imagine he thought things might have ended a bit differently if the cloak didn't temporarily turn into a dragon, so he tried destroying it, just so he could avoid the temptation to do it again. It probably was the wiser to destroy it, but a part of me wondered about what would happen if I fixed itâ€¦

We both sat in silence, the conversation dying before either of us realized it; was fine with that, I had something else far more important for us to discuss. After fighting and discovering who the

Whispering Death was, I felt tired, weary, as if my body was still exhausted from the battle. I came to realize something about my condition, something that Toothless deserved the right to know. I hoped I had the right words for this. I draped over my wing over Toothless, getting his attention and a reluctant smile. "Toothless..." I began.

"Yeahâ€¦" he said.

And then suddenly, I heard a heavy knock on the door. My brother and I turned and listened to the newcomer as he spoke, "It's Thuggory!"

"Come in!" replied my brother. "Door's unlocked!"

Thuggory came bursting into the room, hefting a small barrel and a several bags over his shoulder. He slumped down next to me, dropping the things he carried nearby. "Brought you two grub," he said, placing the barrel close.

"Grub?" Toothless questioned, looking a little queasy.

"I mean food," Thuggory corrected.

Toothless's eye perked up. "Food," he said dreamily, not even shivering. It was like the mere mention made him somehow warmer.

I saw Thuggory's eyes narrow, as if wondering something about my little brother, but that got interrupted from a rumble that shook the room.

"Sorryâ€¦" I told him, even though he couldn't understand, but I imagine that he understood me. I skipped breakfast and lunch earlier, but I couldn't ignore my stomach forever.

"Rightâ€¦" Thuggory said. He uncapped the barrel and a salty smell wafted out. Maybe I was imagining it, but I think something might have been slipping out of my mouth. He also opened one of the many bags he brought along. The smell didn't appeal to me as much as the fish did, but Toothless leapt out of his fortress of bearskin rugs and discarded fur blankets.

"Bread!" Toothless shouted. He snatched the bag Thuggory held in his hands and pulled out a loaf of freshly baked bread. Toothless took hungry bites, quickly devouring it before moving onto the next loaf. Now, he didn't seem at all cold anymore, as if the warmth of the bread was enough for him.

Thuggory looked at my brother, as if considering something, then looked right at me. I don't know why, but ever since my fight with the Whis- Donnar, the Meathead Heir had been giving him odd looks, maybe it was something the former Viking had said. He didn't say anything about that though, not when he was present. "I'm surprised they're still warm," he said.

Toothless seemed to ignore him, content to eat through an entire bag of baked goods.

I took out a small plank from nearby the hearth. It was handy, because anything I wrote would also help keep the fire up. 'THEY

LEAVE YET?' I wrote.

Thuggory seemed to consider it for a moment. "Well, your ships left the harbor before it froze over. Crazy weather, right?" I nodded, that was good. I had asked Mulch and Bucket to travel back to Berk with the fleet Dad sent me, mostly because I didn't want them stranded until the winter season was over. The only reason Toothless and I stayed behind was because I still had to wait until tomorrow for the Hairy Scary Librarian finished translating the Latin parts of parts of my book and my brother was not leaving me. I got the feeling that the only reason I was staying over night was because I flattened a bookshelf in the Library.

Toothless gulped down another loaf of bread, apparently the last one inside. He seemed full, as if he was about to burst. "Ughâ€¦ Thanks, Thuggory," he said, putting himself back into his collection of furs. For a moment, I wondered if my brother would put himself into an eating coma, but his eyes remained open, if a little weary.

The Meathead Heir seemed hesitant for a moment, unsure how to act. "Sureâ€¦" He then got up and promptly walked to the exit. "I'll be right back, maybe sometime later," he told me, giving a small glance at Toothless. My brother didn't notice it, but I got the message, he wanted to talk to meâ€¦ without my brother present. Hopefully he could be back by the time Toothless fell asleep, if not, we'd probably have to meet in the early morning, emphasis early.

I wasn't sure why Thuggory didn't trust my brother like he used to, but I did at least need to trust him, especially since I only made it this far with his help. I nodded, letting the Meathead Chief walk into a snowstorm.

Turning to my brother, it looked like Toothless was out cold. It was such a shame, I wanted to talk to him, when my thoughts were still a little fresh. Maybe, I'd have a second chance, sometime later, maybe we can talk in my dreams. I didn't bring that up with the Hairy Scary Librarian, but I think I had a good idea of why this sort of thing was happening to me anyways.

Shaking my head, I backed away from my brother. I took my tailfin out of the fire, flicking a stuck ember away. The healing part of my tail had grown slightly, enough for me to wonder if I couldâ€¦ do a little something with Toothless once he woke up, it was the least I could do.

I turned back to the barrel Thuggory opened, it was full of fish, that much I could tell. My stomach gave a harsh rumble and I knew it wouldn't forgive me if I passed out a meal at a time this. Giving in, I decided maybe I could do a little more with what I was given.

Since the barrel was quite small, I lifted the barrel with my mouth and tilted it just enough to spill its entire contents right in front of me. Then, I threw the empty barrel away. I was about to pluck one of the fish with my paw, but I stopped myself. For a moment, I wondered to myself if I was doing right thing. Then I realized how silly I was being; dragons didn't use their front limbs to eat with, so that meant I shouldn't either. Toothless was right. A dragon worrying about 'table manners'? That was just odd.

I bent my neck over, down into the pile of scattered fish. I didn't bother with carefully lifting each fish and taking slow and deliberate bites. In fact, I didn't so much as bite as much as I simply used my teeth to pick up every morsel before I swallowed.

"Hiccup?" I heard my brother say just as a trout entered my esophagus.

I turned to him. He was still awake, his eyes a little weary from the cold, but not shivering like before.

"You're notâ€¦ eating correctly," he stammered. At least he wasn't shivering.

I needed to harden myself. I don't know if he wouldâ€¦ really understand what I was going through. "I am," I contested, baring my teeth in a semi-smile. "It's how Stormfly and the other eat when she's in her true form."

I saw my brother blush and nearly stumble back at the mention of a certain Nadder. He corrected himself and sat upright, facing me again. "But that's not how you eat!" he said.

My smile faded. Well, he was definitely paying attention then. I glowered and approached him. "Well, it's going to be how I'll have to eat from now onâ€¦" I said, rolling the barrel of fish away.

"Hiccup, is somethingâ€¦ wrong?" he said, before realization dawned on his eyes. "It'sâ€¦ about the Whispering Death, isn't it?"

I nodded; I wouldn't be having this conversation, if it weren't for today's events. I had to tell Toothlessâ€¦ and maybe my Dad about it.

"But what does that have to do with you deciding to justâ€¦ eat so sloppily?" my brother was exasperated.

"You've been trying to get me to eat 'properly' ever since...my body stopped changing," I pointed out. I was going to say something about Mom, but Toothless didn't exactly like talking about her all that much.

My brother blushed, a little ashamed. "Hiccupâ€¦" he groaned. "This is serious."

"Because talkin about my eating habits is completely serious," I said. Shaking my head, I decided now, I should just tell him. "I've decided thatâ€¦ if I can't find a way to change back, I'll be happy living asâ€¦ one of our Kin." _

My brother blinked his eyes, as if he was trying to disbelieve me. "What are you saying?" Toothless yelled, clearly angry and confused.

"What I'm saying is...Toothless, what if I never could change myself back?"

"But Hiccup, we got the the Hairy Scary Librarian to helpâ€¦ I mean,

he only glared at you half the time! We're getting the book translated and some help to let us learn some of this crazy magic that got us in this mess in the first place. We can turn turn you back!" Toothless insisted.

"I know, I know," I told him. "But what if we can't?"

My brother frowned, silent and waiting for me to explain myself.

I continued, I placed my right paw over my heart. "What if I stay like this forever?"

My brothers frown deepened, but then it shifted neutral expression. "You just gestured to all of youâ€¦"

I don't know what happened, but the solemn and collected feel I was trying to present instantly evaporated, as if my brother's off handed comment doused me in metaphorical water. I barely had the strength to suppress a chuckle and stop my wagging tail from thumping on the floor boards. "Toothless..." I stammered.

Toothless faced turned back to a frown and his head turned downward. Good going, Hiccup, now you're adding being a terrible brother to your list of things the gods will punish you for in your next life time.

"I'm justâ€¦ scared," I admitted. Toothless seemed a little confused by what I had said, as if what I said might have been impossible for him to believe. "It's like you said, it's about the Whispering Deathâ€¦ I just don't want to end up like him."

I thought back to the Whispering Death, to Donnar. In the earliest memory I seen of him, he was just a normal Viking, a simple sailor. Now years later, he was twisted and bitter at the fate that was bestowed on him, he was a twisted and bitter, almost like some relentless beast, under some delusion that he was acting like a sane and rational man. I could have easily become like that, even without having turned into a dragon and for a moment, I wondered if somewhere down the line, that fate might still happen to me.

Toothless must have been thinking the same thing I was, because when I broke free from my thoughts, his gaze was turned directly to the fire in deep contemplation. I gave him a little time to think things through, then I continued. "If I have to live asâ€¦ one of our Kin." I really wish Meatlug would come up with some words we could use to substitute for 'dragon', but apparently, it was hard for the Gronckle. Still, I continued. "If had to be like this forever, I'd accept it."

"You meanâ€¦ you won't find a way turn back?" my brother questioned, still a little confused. That was fine, I was still having a hard time believing I was choosing this.

"No," I replied. "I'm just saying, if I couldn't change back, then I'll accept my fateâ€¦ be like our Kin. Well, maybe I won't live in caves or raid settlements, but maybe I could do some good, use my new form and ability to help other. Maybe I can try something crazy like create a Flight for all the others, but without all the 'Hunting'."

"Maybe do some goodâ€|" my brother moaned. "Maybe try something crazyâ€|" Toothless shook his head. His eyes seemed a little heavier now, the weariness might have gotten to him at last.

"You should sleep," I recommended. "We can talk later."

My brother nodded. "I'llâ€| catch you later," he said. He then laid on his side and grabbed as many furs as he could hold on to. Soon, it was like he surrounded himself in a giant cocoon of animal skins. My little brother fell asleep, practically dead to the world.

* * *

><p>I felt my teeth clatter, the unbearable cold somehow managing to pierce my fortress of heavy furs. How Vikings managed to get through the winter without freezing to death in their own beds was beyond me, but now, I was really wishing I took up my brother's offerâ€| or had him by my side.<p>

Wearily, I blinked my eyes a few times and gave a silent groan of protest. I realized I had awoken from my dreams, just when I was in the best part, too. In my dreams, I was older, maybe twenty-ish, and I had a flaming sword in one hand and a gold plated crossbow in the other. I was battling an army of dragons and men single handed, not even breaking a sweat and just about to storm my enemy's home base. Really, it was just one of those dreams where I had a little wish fulfillment and was all powerful and could do anything I wantedâ€| Everyone had those dreams from time to time. What I find odd though was that the first time I ever imagined myself growing up to be a... Viking, a strong man; up til now, I've only really dreamt about of how I would have been if I was a... Knight, a dragon.

Shaking my head. Well, at least it was a good dream, not a nightmare or one of those weird situations where my brother and I shared a dream. It's not that I didn't like my brother, but sometimes, I feel weirded out whenever we do that, especially if it has anything to do with motherâ€| I just, don't like seeing those things, they bothered me.

My body felt a little refreshed, but still a little weary. The room was dark, the hearth in the center of the room was dim, on its last steps, just barely enough to radiate faint warmth. I figure since it was still dark, maybe just before dawn, I might as well go straight back to slumber and get as much sleep as I could.

But I froze once I heard a voice speaking right behind me. "I still don't don't trust him," it was Thuggory.

Then, I heard something faint, like wood being lightly grazed.

"Look, I'm just saying, don't you think it's kinda odd the Whispering Death managed to follow you to the Library?" I heard Thuggory say again. For a moment, I imagined that the Meathead Heir was having a conversation with himself, but that just didn't make sense; he was talking to someone. Who was it?

Then I heard that wood scratching sound again, was someoneâ€| writing something on wood? Taking a chance, I quietly turned my head around.

I saw Hiccup scrawling something on a plank for Thuggory to read. Oh, right, I must still be a little drowsyâ€¦

The two of them were right across me from the central hearth, discussing in the dim light of the fire. They didn't seem notice me, both having their gazes pointed at the fire. I quickly decided not to bother then, onlyâ€¦ listen in, hear if something catches my attention.

The Meathead Heir sighed. "Yeah, I know you trust him, butâ€¦ well, the whole incident with Grimmaw, eh, Donnar has me wondering about himâ€¦"

Were they talking about Bucket? I mean. Sure, I know that that he tried to treat his old friend, but I can't honestly say I blame himâ€¦ and I've had nightmares about his old friend for ages. He didn't deserve to have people look at him suspiciously, his friend on the otherhand...

My brother scrawled something. I couldn't read it, not from where I was. I think I saw Thuggory roll his eyes before tossed the wooden plank into the dying fire. "Hiccupâ€¦ I think your brother might be, I don't know a spy."

I think my heart froze over and immediately, I turned back on my side, hoping they didn't notice I was even awake. Thuggory didn't trust me? What did I do? Was that why he's been giving me all of those odd looks today? I just thought he was worried about me, not worried _due to me_!

Then, I heard Hiccup write something in response. I couldn't tell if he was angry or was upset or anything at all, not without exposing myself.

"I don't know how you can be so trusting," muttered Thuggory. "Look, I'm just saying, Donnar said something about your Mom before he fled. I don't know what, but becoming an 'Honorless monster' sends up a very big red flag."

I heard Hiccup give a snort before writing some more.

"I know the guy was crazyâ€¦ really crazy, but what exactly happened to your Mom? She was gone for most of your life you know and then boom, suddenly, you have a little brother; I don't need to tell that's a little bit fishyâ€¦ I think your brother, if he is your brother, he might be hiding something from you." As Thuggory said that, I heard myself gulp, just barely quite enough for them not to hear. I came a little late to today's fight; I didn't know there was something said about my mother.

I heard Hiccup write something. I really hoped it was the words 'It's better you don't know'. I didn't want to tell Thuggory everything, especially not about the fact I nearly burned down the Library all those months ago or that my brother and I were related to one of the reason dragon raids are so effective. I mean, sure Hiccup has turned into a Night Fury, but no one's honestly realized all the Night Furies in the Barbaric Archipelago are related to each other. Iâ€¦ didn't want him to know. If he did, I just might loseâ€¦ an ally, maybe something more.

Thankfully, it didn't seem Thuggory was told. "Fine, you don't have to tell me." he grunted. "I'll trust you...for now." I gave a sigh of relief, one major political disaster averted.

Then I heard my brother scribe something yet again. He was right, writing was annoying; I couldn't tell what he was telling to Thuggory. I heard the sound of footsteps getting farther away.

I turned wondering what Hiccup and the Meathead Heir were planning. I caught a glimpse of the two of them retreating to the far corner of the room, barely visible in the dim lighting. They were walking to a large box, that secret project between my brother and my teacher. It was left behind when the sailors were putting the final preparations on their leaving.

Thuggory took out a hammer, a work hammer, and undid the nails, opening the container. I couldn't see what was in it, but I think I sawâ€¦ hay inside. No, that can't be right. There was something else, that much I knew.

Thuggory almost turned to look back at me, but I turned around and pretended I was still sleeping. "Soâ€¦ you want me to help you get this on?" I heard him say.

I held my breath forâ€¦ Loki, I think, knows how long. Thuggory and Hiccup didn't say anything, but I heard noises, mostly the sound of iron buckles being tightened.

Then before I knew it, Thuggory was walking out the front door. "Well, I'll catch you laterâ€¦" he said. "Let me just say, you are one odd dragon, Hiccup." My brother snorted, dismissively, and the Meathead Heir was then gone.

With him gone, I decided now would be a good time to try going back to actual sleep, before Hiccup suspects that Iâ€¦ Then, I felt somethingâ€¦ wet brush against the side of my face, drool. I gagged,

"So, how long were you awake?" Hiccup told me, questioned me.

"When you were talking about me," I groaned. Wiping my brother's spit off my face. A part of me realized that I shouldn't be too grossed out by having a dragon's saliva on my face, but maybe it was just because it was Hiccup the one doing the licking. I asked him, "How'd you know?"

"You were too quiet," my brother said. "Your teeth were rattling until you awoke."

I turned to him, frowning. felt little foolish. I would never have thought that in my attempt to be stealthy would be exactly what _gave me away_. "What are you wearing?" I asked.

My brother was wearing this odd getup, something almost vaguely reminiscent of a vest or maybe a girdle but made entirely of leather. Straps and buckles ran through his front, keeping the getup firmly secure. On the back, I could see the leather was made somewhat thicker, moulded on the area just on his shoulders, with some struts and metal and wooden bits sticking out just bellow.

"Oh, nothing just â€¦uh, hang on," he struggled to find a word. That was one of the downsides of being a dragon, the language did not have words for everything humans had. Hiccup then took another wooden plank and began writing on it. He inscribed several runes, forming the word 'SADDLE'.

"You mean like that thin the farmers would use when they wanted to ride the yaks?" I asked. It didn't happen often, mostly because there wasn't much need to travel far from the village, but I did know that a saddle was just something that somehow helped a rider stay on a yak. Somehow, I felt a little disappointed on why Gobber and my brother decided to make a saddle for some secret project, but maybe I was just not seeing something.

"Yeah, except for a Night Fury."

I frowned. He wanted me to get on him yet again and there wasn't much I could do to deny him if he really wanted me to. Maybe I could humor him. "Why do you need a saddle?"

"So you can put this on," he said. My brother dragged something else into view.

I picked it up, it was another leather getup, this time more sized for me. It felt very light, definately made from a smoother, softer material than what my brother had on him. "What is it?" I asked.

"A flightâ€¦" Hiccup sighed, clearly hating the limited language of dragons. He wrote 'FLIGHT SUIT' on the same wooden plank as before.

"Why do we need a flight suit?" I questioned. "I mean, we don't need one to fly."

"So you don't fall offâ€¦" he said.

"Or decide to run away from you," I added.

"No," my brother said flatly. He then pointed at the two cords of rope by the sides of the so-called flight suit, right by where my hips would have been. "This will prevent you from falling off."

Holding the flight suit up, I wondered. Just what made this so special? I was actually expecting something moreâ€¦ awe inspiring from the my brother, like a translator charm or even a suit of dragonfire proof armor. Thisâ€¦ just felt, I don't know, unimpressive, unneeded? How does not falling off from my brother really help me?

Hiccup must have noticed my frown and his face twisted to reflect mine. "You could wear it, we could go flying right now if you wanted to..."

"But we don't have to go anywhere," I said. "The books won't be done until tomorrow night orâ€¦ well, tonight, I guess, if it's really that late."

"I know, we could go flying for the sake of flyingâ€¦" Hiccup suggested.

"Could you fly?" I asked.

Hiccup then showed me his tail, a slight gleam on his eyes. It had fully healed, the cuts, bruises, and the missing chunks had all filled themselves in. I honestly wanted to feel a little jealous; my leg still hurt a little and will likely be that way for a few more weeks. But then again, Hiccup actually lost limbs. He was so lucky...

"In that cold?" I said flatly. "I'd rather stay inside for the whole winterâ€¦ maybe hibernate."

"You're going to have to get used to it eventually," my brother warned me. "It doesn't bother you that bad once you've gotten used to itâ€¦"

I wanted to steel myself, to resist my brother just this one, but the idea of what might happen if I backed out. I imagined going back to Berk, staying in doors for all of winter for every year. I didn't think anyone would take me seriously if I couldn't stand a little cold weather every now and again, Dad might think I'mâ€¦

I blinked. Hiccup was giving me that grin he had when he knew he had me. I wanted to just squash myself. "Okay, okay," I told him. "I'll go with you, but if Dad asks if I am missing a few toesâ€¦"

"I'll tell him you were looking for treasure," Hiccup said. "He'll understand." Odd, Dragonese had a word for 'treasure', but then again, the King knew what coins wereâ€¦

I tossed aside a dozen layers of animal pelts and felt a rush of cold sweep over my body. I didn't like it, but I didn't feel like my body was just about to turn into a block of ice when the snow started dropping; maybe Hiccup was right and I was slowly getting used to itâ€¦ or maybe my senses were getting dull because something was very wrong with me. Either way, I put on the flight suit Hiccup prepared for me, slipping it over my wolf fur coat.

Once, I was done, Hiccup bent over and pulled me up with his jaws. A quick jolt of pain surged onto my damaged leg, but I quickly got over it. Then, I limped over to the door, my brother giving me the support I needed to keep moving forward. I might need a walking stick once I got back home, anything to stop having to rely on the overly eager Night Fury standing beside me.

I pushed over the door and a blast of snow slammed into face, almost giving me a white beard that reached down to my waist. I wiped the snow off, feeling annoyed.

Stepping outside, I could tell that winter had definitely come. The Meatheads's village was covered in a faint blanket of snow that fell gently from the dark skies above. In the distance, I could see light glimmering, the dawn fast approaching. Rooftops were covered in covered in thin mats of white, almost looking like miniaturized mountains. Walkways and roads disappeared, almost giving me the impression I was at some wild, undisturbed place. All the while, the village still was in the last grips of sleep, a few early risers milling about. It reminded me so much of my home, both of them.

"Ready, bud?"

"Ready to get myself killed? You bet," I told him, managing to have better luck at suppressing my shivers. It was easier because I strangely had a warm feeling in my chest.

I climbed onto my brother. "Now, just tie yourself to the hooks on my back."

I nodded and complied. Now that I was on him, I noticed that the cords of rope on my flight suit fit perfectly with the set of metal hooks on the front part of the saddle.

As soon as I did that, my brother lurched forward and took off into the air. Hiccup rose upward, climbing higher and higher, his wings flapping with such rapidity. I held on tightly, feeling myself nearly slide off my brother's back. I put my feet into the stirrups, to stop my fall. "What are you doing?" I shouted my question.

"Climbing higher!" Hiccup told me. "Hang on!"

I did, grabbing hold to a bar of wood placed by the base of my brother's neck. I tried not to look down, not even when I could feel my stomach being pulled so far behind me.

And then, Hiccup stopped climbing, leveling himself, going into what I used to call 'cruising', soaring just fast enough to keep flying, but not so fast enough that anyone riding would lose his grip. "Did you really have to do that?" I asked him. I caught a glimpse of where we were and I and I think I was more worried about the fall rather than freezing...

"I did," Hiccup said, a cheer in his voice. Before, I could ask why, my brother seemed to know what I was about to say and answered my question before I asked. "So I could do this!"

He lunged forward, angling his wings tightly, and went into a dive. The dive was fast, far faster than I had ever experienced before as a passenger and I could feel my heart pounding. I gripped tightly on my brother's saddle, regretting everything. "Did you at least test this?" I screamed.

"That's what we're doing!" replied my brother.

For a long, agonizing moment of fear, I thought we were going to crash into the ocean, but my brother opened his wings at the last moment. We glided just above the water's edge at high speed, a light tail of sea foam bubbled just behind us.

I started breathing again, my panic over. "You scared me!" I shouted.

"So, you thought that was scary, bud?" my brother laughed.

And then, suddenly, Hiccup tilted his wings and flew on his side. I felt cold and bitter sea water splash it my face and I wiped it away from my face in frustration.

"You are a €| mean overgrown lizard!" I yelled. Probably not the

best series of insults I could have come up with, but that might have been the seawater talking.

"You used to be one, too, you know!" my brother replied. I could tell he was enjoying thisâ€¦ even though I didn't. His speed dropped gradually, the boost given by his steep dive was quickly dissipating.

"Can we please go back now?" I begged.

"Not just yet," said Hiccup. "One more thing I want to try." My brother then took us back closer to the island, but not the village. Instead, I could tell he was planning on heading into a dense forest, the tall evergreens frosted with light snow. As we closer, my brother began beating his wings harder and harder, building up speed as he went.

I felt my heart sink. He can't possibly be thinking of doingâ€¦ that, that was crazy, I'd fall off. I mean, I did this trick once, but that was back when _I _was the one with wings and I didn't have someone riding on me back then!

Hiccup rushed forward, his speed reaching levels far faster than I felt safe in. I held on tightly, feeling the rush of speed on my body. We darted through trees, making narrow turns and daring evasions.

I almost wanted to unstrap myself, to get off, andâ€¦

I don't know what happened exactly. I felt scared one moment, closing my eyes and wish I had my own two feet were on the ground.

But during the the next felt odd, like I suddenly realized I something very important, something I completely forgot. I leaned my body forward, bringing myself closer to Hiccup's head, my eyes open.

Up ahead, I could see a tall pine, a luscious evergreen that my brother was practically racing forward. Hiccup turned once again, narrowing avoiding a crash, but this time, things were different. I was the one who started the turn, my brother simply followed my lead.

I was not flying my brother, nor was I controlling Hiccup; I just simply...steering him, guiding him. It was as if I knew his next movements, saw his next action, and simply confirmed it for him. We darted through more trees, each time, we pulled narrow escapes, almost as if we were making the same decisions at the same time.

We both veered upward, above the canopy. "What took you so long?" I heard my brother say. His head was turned back at me, just enough I could that faint grin of his.

"I was justâ€¦ remembering something I forgot."

"Oh?" Hiccup questioned, knowingly. "What would that be?"

I grinned. I can't believe I actually forgot how enjoyable it was to just simplyâ€¦ fly for the sake of flying. It was more than a simple trip from going one place to the next, more than simply a tool to

achieve some goal."Flying is fun," I told him simply.

I think our smiles were frozen to our faces for the rest of the morning. It didn't matter so much that I was on my older brother doing something I had technically outgrown; what mattered was that we enjoyed ourselves.

We pulled more stunts, more crazy and dangerous things in the cold wind; I think noon came before either of us realized how long we were gone.

I also learned something new, the reason my brother made his saddle and my flight suit. No matter how fast or how steep the dive, I did not fear falling.

10. Chapter 10

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****I just realized that I got into the habit of posting every 5 days, 4 days to write, the fifth day's afternoon is when I posted. This is a bit shorter than usual in terms of total word length, but I think it makes sense.****

****Anyways, enjoy and if you like this story, please leave a comment for me to read.****

* * *

><p>"And then Hiccup drove of the Whispering Death off the island!" I proudly declared, much to the astonishment of those around the gathered around the dining table. None of them were seated at the table, mostly they were just gathering around just as a I recalled the past few days events. I probably wondered what they thought was more fantastic, the fact we lived in a world where Vikings can turn into dragons or that my brother could fight such a terrifying enemy and win. That'd show them not to underestimate us.

Father sat at the opposite end of the table, a faint smile on his face. He took a drink his mead goblet and then asked, "And then you sent the fleet home without you?" He didn't seem all too upset, most likely because the docks were likely to freeze sometime soon.

My brother nodded. Hiccup sat right next to me, well, sort of. He had his rear planted firmly on the floor since no normal chair would have been able to support all his weight. He then took a bite out of his plate of raw fish. I'll admit, it unnerved a little every time he swallowed something whole, that was going to take some time getting used to...

"We needed to stay behind for a day longer," I explained. "Besides, we could have flown home at any time."

"I can see that," my Father pointed out. Father was being literal of course. As soon as Hiccup shown me that saddle Gobber made for him, he never took the thing off. Granted, I was also dressed up in my flight suit, but that was only because we came homeâ€|around fifteen minutes ago, just in time to catch dinner.

"Yeah, and to think it took him this long to realize he wasn't wearing anything," I muttered.

Hiccup gave me a look that made me wonder if he going to do cover me in drool again just to annoy me, but instead he told me, "I don't know, I think lots of people say you're really strong and tough if you can stand the cold weather without wearing anything."

"Isn't being a dragon is cheating?" was my reply.

"That doesn't mean I'm not tough," Hiccup pointed out.

I counter, "But you're wearing something nowâ€¦"

Father didn't understand a word he said, but I think he got the general idea. "Well, the Meatheads must have been really impressed with that getup; Vikings flying dragons, just as crazy as Vikings turning into dragons I say," he said, much to the agreement of a dozen other Vikings.

My brother and I had our face contort into big grins that threatened to fly off at any moment. Both of us a little proud of our flying over the Meatheads earlier today. While we were waiting for the Hairy Scary Librarian to deliver us our books, we did some 'joy riding' over the Village. We spent the whole day pulling fancy stunts or performing crazy tricks with our only stops being to eat and to rest whenever we got too exhausted. Onlookers who saw us were amazed, all of them gave us cheers and shouts as we danced around the sky. Other than working together in the forge, flying had just become our favorite 'bonding activity'.

"You can say that," I told our Father.

"Well, looks like you two did well," Father said, a grin plastered onto his face. "Not only have you accomplished your task and brought home much needed supplies back home, you have strengthened our ties with our neighboring Tribe and you have completed a your first official Quest."

"Quest?" I knew what a Quest was, but I didn't think what we just went through qualified.

Father glanced back at Bucket and Mulch. They were sitting on their own table a small distance off. The latter "Well, it was only a simple trading trip to another nearby island, but facing a deadly enemy and earning a payment for it makes it count in my book. Mogadon must have had a hard time believing you bested a dragon twice!"

"Right, deadly enemy..." I trailed off. Then, Hiccup gave me a stern expression, as if waiting for me to say something. I just stared back, not backing off this time. Brother did nothing. This was not be the right place to discussâ€¦ Donnar. I'm a little biased when the matter involves Whispering my little spiel about my brother defeating him, I deliberately left out a few parts, like the fact that he was someone who was from Berk or he had turned human. The truth was something for either Bucket or my brother to discuss and I don't think I'm the only one who thought that. "Well, if you want to I'm sure Hiccup or Bucket will let you know any of the important to know

details."

Father nodded. Whether or not he already knew the truth, I couldn't tell. He gave a short sigh of relief. Then he stood up turning his attention the whole audience, his mug held up high. "And speaking about dragons, we've made it to the Winter season without dragons ransacking the village in months! We can celebrate Snoggletog in peace!"

The assembled crowd roared with excitement, obviously glad that they wouldn't have to worry as much about dragons destroying their homes. During this time of the year, the King let his servants have their leave. Even the Knights had their duties significantly diminished and often returned to their home fiefdoms. This wasn't to say dragon attacks did not happen, sometimes Knights gathered some commoners on their own little hunting parties. The raids merely happened much less often and they were often much smaller than at any other time of the year. Though, for the life of me, I couldn't exactly remember what made this season so important.

"What's Snoggletog?" I whispered to Hiccup. The adults were still talking, their voices raised in cheer. They ignored us almost completely whilst discussing things like decoration and sacrificial offerings.

"Just a festival we celebrate during the Winter. You'll like it!" he said.

"And why does it haveâ€¦"

Hiccup cut me off, apparently knowing exactly what I was going ask. "I know it's a dumb name," said my brother. "No one knows why we call it that, but that's just what we call it... "

I don't get Viking names sometimes. Most a fine, but then others just make nose But 'Snoggletog'? Really? I glowered at him, but I didn't press him about that; I knew that would just lead to nowhere. "Soâ€¦ what's it about?"

"It's a festival," Hiccup said. "There's going to be lot of eating and drinking, bud. You'll love it." I was looking forward to sampling the food off of tables and I imagined what kinds of nice dishes I could find. Maybe there'll be some fried oysters or deep fried yak. Drinking, I didn't fancy as much, but still, maybe I could find a nice goblet of milk to wash everything else down. Already, I could feel my mouth water.

"So, it's just a celebration, then?" Dragons had festivals, often to mark special occasions or notable individuals and I think Berk hosted their for the same reason. I think there was a winter one coming up, but I forgot what it was about. Maybe it had something to do with the King releasing the majority of his servants from service.

"Yes," Hiccup confirmed. "But during the celebration, it's customary to exchange gifts with othersâ€¦"

I frowned. If it's customary to exchange gifts with others, I wanted to know just what that meantâ€¦ and if possible figure out what I would exchange. "With who?"

Hiccup's shoulders bulged forward in a shrug. "Whoever you want," my brother told me, "family, close friendsâ€¦"

"â€¦Astrid?" I guessed.

Hiccup backed away, almost ashamed, but he confirmed my guess. "Astrid."

I might as well press on and ask for help. "So, what did you get her?"

"I gave her axe polish last year," he told me in as cold and low of a voice he could manage. I knew why he seemed so depressed, Astrid lost her prized axe a few months ago. Now it was unusable, enshrined in the Hofferson clan house.

"So, what are going to do?" I asked.

"Just something for you and Dad," he said. I nodded. Whatever that meant, I hoped he knew what he was doing.

I finally decided I had enough being trapped under a mountain of Viking men and suggested for my brother and I to leave the table. Dad was clearly wrapped up talking to the villagers, planning for the upcoming holiday. Hiccup easily cleared the way for us to leave. One the advantages of having a large scaly reptile for a brother, people tended to pay attention to that.

Still, I wondered just who would I be giving things to this year? And what? I mean, I know I'm my Father's son and all, but I didn't exactly have much money all of my own. I could probably make a few axes or spears and gift those, but I don't think Berk needed that many more weapons.

And then, there was the possibility I had to give Hiccup something. That terrified me to no end. When I learned that I had him for an older sibling, a part of me sighed in relief while the rest of me frantically denied it. Before, I was worried of being in so much debt to Hiccup that I could never repay him for his kindness. Once it was revealed we were siblings, that debt practically went away. His old clothes became my new hand-me-downs, the lessons he gave me became things expected of him. Now, I shuddered to think what I could possibly give the brother who gave me my...everything.

Thinking on more possible matters, I realized that I could easily get things for my human friends. My older cousin Snotlout would obviously get a flail or maul, his choice. Fishlegs would want books and/or dragon related things, so maybe I could get a book from somewhere. The twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut, wouldn't mind receiving their own cruel weapons. I could probably make an axe for Astridâ€¦ Maybe something else for Thuggory, something to at least trust me a little more.

But then I realized, there were others I needed to think about. It owed it to my former peers, since I more or less dragged them into the mess I was stuck in. I had very little idea of what I could get them. I could probably get matching helmets to go along with the twins. Meatlug would be difficult, but maybe I can ask for Fishlegs's advice since she seemed to always be near the guy. Hookfang stumped me though. I grew up having him near me all the time, but that was

just because he was my teacher's grandson; I didn't really talk to him all that much.

As for the Nadder, Stormfly? Forget her. I don't think I would have given her anything, even if I had the foggiest of ideas. Back when we were in Squire training, she was one of the ones who teased me the most, often telling me that I didn't earn my place in the Knighthood. These days, I think she might have had a point, but I'm not going to admit that in front of her.

Before I knew it, I found myself gravitating towards the table where my former peers were gathered. All them save the Zippleback were in human form and talking amongst themselves.

"So, should we stay?"

"Or should we go?" asked both heads of the Zippleback. I still had a little trouble telling which head was which.

"Well, it is that time of yearâ€¦" suggested Meatlug while absentmindedly flipping through the pages of a book. "But I wouldn't mind staying."

"We do have to stay around, for our Hosts. My liege needs me after all, especially afterâ€¦ yesterday. We have many responsibilities here to the Chief," said the tall dark haired boy. Hookfang was always big for his age and that still showed even in human form.

"We do have to consider informing our other Kin, our relatives. With the upcoming festival, this might be our only chance to meet up with them, without drawing the direct attention of the other Flight Commanders; I do not wish to see them until our teacher is avenged..." said what I assumed to be a certain Nadder.

"So does that mean," started who I assumed to be Barf.

Belch completed. "We stay for Snoggletog?"

"I don't know. What is Snoggletog anyways? And does it really have to have such a strange name?" asked Stormfly.

My former peers were clearly talking about leaving somewhere for the Winter, but were kept from going due to their duties on Berk. It must have had to do something with the Winter festival again. I decided it would be a good idea to move past them before they had the chance to realize I was there.

But instead of letting me go forward, Hiccup patted me on the back with his tail and gave me a look. "Ask them to stay."

"Why me?" I said. "You do remember they can understand you, you know."

"I remember," he said. "But they're your friends."

I sighed. I didn't want to force them to stay if they didn't want to; it was because of me they were here in the first place, I shouldn't be the one to force them stay if they didn't want to go. On the other hand, I wouldn't object if they stuck aroundâ€¦ Besides, I was kind of depending on my brother to help me walk. I really need to get a

staff or walking stick, anything to stop him from having so much leverage over me.

"It's a sort of gift giving celebration," I told my former peers. As we approached, they all turned and looked at me. "At least, that's what my brother says."

"Gift exchange?" mused Meatlug.

"You mean like..." start Barf.

Both of the Zippleback heads then started looking around, as if to check if there was anyone else who could overhearing, despite the fact the only other people who could have understood them were a trio of horribly singing Nadders. "Like our King does?"

I shook my head. "No, not those kind of gifts," I said. The King had the power to bestow strange and marvelous powers to his favored servants. My old teacher One Eye for instance could see as good, perhaps than any normal dragon who had both working eyes. Though, what I would give to have access to one of the most commonly received gifts, the power of healing.

"Then, what are we receiving?" asked Hookfang.

"Items, possessions," I supplied.

"Clothing?" mused Stormfly.

"Yeah, like that." I said. Well, actually I didn't know if clothes were a smart idea, but I don't think I would have minded having more things to wear. Was that what she wanted?

Then, Stormfly's deep blue eyes focused on me, like a hawk, and I suddenly felt cold, like I was going to start shivering at any moment. I feared she might go make a comment about how weak I was since I needed my brother to help me walk without straining my injured leg. "Did you really face a Whispering Death and shoot out its eye?"

"Umâ€¦ yeah," I said. I didn't know what else to say, only to confirm what I had done. For a moment, I feared like I might have put myself into the firing line.

"And you were injured for it?"

Before I could have done the smart thing and shut up about it, my mouth moved on its own, "One of my legs got was crippled." I wanted to just run away now, I practically gave her permission. Hastily, I added, "Temporarily."

She seemed to consider my for a moment, most likely to figure out the best way to mock me. Then said with a grin that almost scared me more than the Whispering Death. "Then I think you had the better aim. Good job."

It took me a second for me to process that. Did she really justâ€¦ compliment me? For a moment, I wondered she might have been catching me off guard, just to make my whole situation worse. But, she didn't look like she normally did. She wasn't dressed any different; she had

the same tunic and silk scarf like always, but she just didn't seem to have the same air about her.

"Why are you giving me that look?" She said.

"Uh, it's just nothing!"

Stormfly gave a growl. It actually sounded, I don't know...cute, like listening to a puppy try to growl. Still, it did sound threatening. "Well, then you better recover. Though, I don't think it'd make much

"Uh, thanksâ€¦" I replied. Maybe I was just imagining things. She was still the same old Stormfly I had always known. Before I could walk away, Hiccup's tail slapped my back, reminding me why I got involved in the first place. "So are you going to be staying or not?"

Stormfly and the others turned and looked at each other, as if that was enough to have a quick discussion. "It is decided then, we will attend this 'Snoggletog' of yours." said Stormfly. "I suppose I can wait another year before attending my first mating festivalâ€¦"

And with that, I suddenly remembered what made the Winter so important, mating season was coming soonâ€¦

I really hope Mother does not stop by for a visit with her free timeâ€¦

* * *

><p>Ever since I've been stuck in this body, I've gotten used to having eyes that could see so clearly in the dark. It was really handy, really, probably the one natural ability I had that I've used more than any other. I never had to worry about being near blind or fear that I might step in something I just because I couldn't see it. It's no wonder Mom or Toothless could easily pinpoint and destroy catapult towers even in the darkest night; Night Furies only needed the faintest of lights.<p>

And I was using this incredible power to read. Without a candle. Yes, Hiccup, you're a genius, use one of the most incredible and amazing parts of being a dragon for the most mundane things. Well, I guess it offsets the fact I had no hands. My paws were simply put too big to even manage turning a page without flipping over a dozen parts all at once. It was possible, but really difficult. If I tried flipping pages while I had a candle? I would be surprised if I _didn't _destroy a neighborhood blocks; I've done that before.

Maybe if I had been a little more patient, I could have waited until morning and had Toothless or Dad to come and help me read. But tonight, it seemed like I was out of patience. I have been waiting for a breakthrough for a months now and I have used the last of my ability to wait longer just to keep me until I had returned home. How could I not want to learn the information that could fix everything?

I was by the house's hearth Now that it was Winter, it would pretty much be going nonstop. I took advantage of it, using it as my light source, despite the fact I was maybe a dozen feet away. Toothless and

Dad were sleeping in their respective beds, leaving me alone with a book. Other than turning a page, I had very few problems reading the book on Rune based magic the Hairy Scary Librarian wrote.

According to the book, Rune magic is simple and can be summed up with the phrase 'Words have power'. It's about putting words on objects and using them to store and control the power imbued into the item. Unfortunately, that's where the simplicity ends.

First off, the Runes involved are not the same kind used in everyday life. They're still Norse Runes, but I think they're the special kind, like the ones used by priests to dedicate temples and label tombs. This part, I didn't think I had a full understanding of, but I think Fishlegs would be a big help.

Second, the Runes written on an item had to specify exactly what the intended effect was, otherwise, things would be random. There's a very detailed example of how simply writing 'Fire' on a sword was not enough to make a flaming sword. Such a blade had a good chance of setting its wielder and anyone in a twenty yard radius a blaze. Writing 'Fire', 'On' and 'Sword' in that order was better, but even then, there was a good chance the sword would constantly be melting itself without more words to protect it. With my luck, I might suddenly turn someone into a dragon because I misspell something.

Third, the more complex the enchantment was going to be, the more power it would need backing it up. Using the flaming sword example, making a sword that was on fire was one thing, making a sword that could melt through stone was another matter entirely; the amount of skill and power needed was just way different. This part is what the Hairy Scary Librarian was talking about when he said that it was odd my brother and I could use runes despite lacking formal training. The whole point of the training was to give an initiate enough skill and practice to develop a reserve of energy and channel it into an enchantment. Whatever it was, the book didn't know, yet somehow, my brother and I had this part covered.

There were also a dozen other nuances like how certain materials did better at focusing certain enchantments, how making enchantments at certain times of day or during special occasions of a year could affect the process, and how people's names fit in, but I didn't think I needed to know all that stuff just yet. I needed to know the basics before I worried about the complicated stuff. Maybe tomorrow, I could read about what are the actual steps in the imbuing process.

Before I could go any further, I heard someone knocking on the door. Which was odd, considering what hour it is. Putting my book away, I went over to the door. "Who is it?" I barked. Hopefully, whoever it was could understand it... and not think I was threatening him.

"It's me!" said a muffled, but familiar voice.

"Astrid?" I called out.

"Yeah!"

With some difficulty, I twisted the door knob with my tongue, revealing a very familiar blonde girl standing just outside the

threshold. Well, mostly blonde girl. Astrid had changed in the few days I had been away. She was barefoot, her feet having grown large and morphed into a shape vaguely reminiscent of a bird's. Her eyes has both turned golden yellow, showing a dim glow. I could only stare at the girl, my mouth agape.

"Careful, your mouth might freeze open," Astrid told me.

I still stared for a while longer. "Astrid, what happened?"

"Stormfly is a better fighter than Toothless," she declared while flashing me a big satisfied grin. Even her smile had changed, becomingâ€| sharper. And yet, I still found it so endearing.

"Uh, come in!" I told her once I snapped out of my trance.

She stepped in and immediately regretted it once her hand touched the doorknob to close it. "Ew, gross!"

"Sorry!" I cried. "Only had the tongue!" Note to self, ask Gobber to make a door able to be opened by a dragon, just so I don't embarrass myself in front of her any more than I had to. I didn't need to think twice before I decided to change the topic. "Uhâ€| why are you here?"

"So I can't come visit a friend?" she questioned, making me feel a little guilty. Right, I forgot Astrid was a friend now, not some girl who I just knew and stayed away from me.

"Uh, I didn't find you at the Great Hall," I said. I actually said 'Great Den', but she knew what I meant.

"Dad grounded me for a week," she said with a not-so-wistful smile.

"And you snuck out?" I think I had a hard time trying to understand that. Astrid, the girl who pretty much was obedient and straightforward, sneaking out seemed stranger than her physical transformation. Whyâ€| that's almost like something Camicazi would do.

Astrid merely shrugged. "Dad kinda went nuts once I started having a taste for raw fishâ€|"

"Well, I don't blame youâ€|" I said, mostly buy more time just to try to understand what I was seeing. "It's oddly satisfyingâ€|"

The partially-dragon girl took a seat by the hearth and began warming herself. I took a seat right next to her, after flicking the Rune writing guide away with my tail. "You know, I missed having you around."

"You did?" That surprised me. Astrid broke out of her own home just to see me, that's a first and I'm actually surprised I didn't have to do that first.

"Uhuh, it would have been nice to have someone tell me what I should expectingâ€| someone that wasn't Snotlout."

Oh, right. No need to panic Hiccup, it's nothing major. She came to see you, not that she came to see you. Honestly, you've been trying to get her attention for the longest time and now you're so scared of that. "Snotlout isn't that badâ€¦" Which is why you're trying to get her to talk about Snotlout. Perfect.

Astrid snorted. "Have you seen him lately?"

"Uh, no?" I sputtered.

She shook her head. "Just, never mind. Look, you'll know what happened when you see him..."

Okay, now I really wonder what's happened to my cousin in the past few days. Back in the Great Hall, I overheard Hookfang talk about something happening to Snotlout, something yesterday. Just how bad was it? I mean, I got that he was probably tougher and stronger than I was, but still, he wasn't immortal. One arrow to the heart and I was sure he'd still die. Now that this topic turned a little dark all I could really say was, "Okayâ€¦" in an awkward tone.

The conversation died then and there for a few minutes. Astrid kept warming herself by the fire, she was still mostly human. I had finally managed to understand what was going to happen to her.

Maybe it was wishful and selfish thinking, but I actually wished she was going to turn into a Night Fury. It would have been nice having another one around, someone who could have been my equal. That and I would have finally had a chance. Who was I kidding? I never had a chance, not unless I was the last guy on Midgard she could have dated. I managed to finally say. "You're turning into a Nadderâ€¦"

Astrid nodded. "Stormfly says it fits me," she said. "Can't say I really understand why. I'm not really all that obsessive about my appearance, not like she is."

"But you doâ€¦" As soon as I said it, I started to believe it. Ever since her uncle, Fearless Finn, died, Astrid always played up the image, the ideal, that she was going to be Berk's toughest warrior one day. She kept training whenever she had the spare time and thrown punches and jabs to both her enemies _and friends._ "Just not in the typical Nadder way. You tend to be moreâ€¦ aggressive."

"Oh, you mean like this?" she said, before landing a elbowing me in the chest.

I recoiled away, maybe a little stunned that Astrid could still manage to break a rib. "Ow!"

She gave herself a smirk. "I missed having my favorite punching bag around."

I returned a sheepish smile. A month ago, I probably have been scared of receiving a hit like that, I would have lost whatever remained of my then slowly ebbing humanity. Now, I just simply lacked anything left to lose. "Wellâ€¦ thanks." Still, I guess if anything, Astrid considered me a I can settle for that if not...

"Why are you giving me that look?" she said.

Embarrassed about what I was thinking about, I felt my cheeks flush. I really hope myself were black enough to cover that. "Uhâ€¦ nothing." Great, now she thinks I am more weird than I normally am.

Astrid just shook her head as if to break a thought off her mind. "So, Stormfly's staying with us forâ€¦" her face contorted a little bit, trying to use a word that she could no longer use.

"I know, I was there Toothless convinced her." I said. I'm actually not all that surprised Snoggletog did not have a comparable word in Dragonese. I was an odd name, even by Berk or even normal Viking standards.

Astrid nodded before leaning a little bit closer to the fire. "Well, anyways, did you know that Winter signals the start of mating season?" She must have noticed my face turn into an inquisitive look. "Yeah, apparently, they," she means dragons, "form couples in the Winter and have a whole festival about when their kids hatch all at the same time."

I wonder if Fishlegs was pestering Meatlug about thatâ€¦or if Meatlug had other ideas in mind. As far as I knew, Spring was when other creatures than humans found their mates, just at the start of the relatively warmer part of the year to allow their young to have an easy time growing up. But then again, dragons never had to worry about frostbite or having their insides freeze up, with the ability to create fire anywhere and all.

I also frowned. Suddenly, I realized why I was suddenly soâ€¦ focused on Astrid. With a painful realization, I knew I needed to do something about that before things just ended up worse. Part of me accepting that I might live the rest of my life as a dragon meant that I had to accept that I couldn'tâ€¦ No, I couldn't dwell on that too much. I had no chance anyways.

"Is something wrong?" She must

I shook my head. "Uh, no, nothing," I lied. She didn't need to know or at least I didn't need to say anything. At the same time, I also realized something else. "So, do you think that why our Kin," I said in place of the word 'dragon', since I finally got tired of skirting around using it, "don't attack us much during the Winter? They have to raise their young?"

Astrid nodded. "Yeah, apparently, the Flights are temporarily disbanded while this happens. All of them suddenly have the free time to do whatever they wanted."

I felt my heart freeze over, as if I was suddenly a normal average boy who didn't have insides that burned so hot. "All of them?" I repeated, a crazy and insane idea forming in my head.

"Yeah, according to Stormfly, all of them, even the Flight Commanders go off and pursue whatever they want," Astrid confirmed. She then frowned for a very obvious reason. "Hiccup, you have that look on your face whenever you have an ideaâ€¦"

I nodded. "It's definitely crazy.

Astrid gave a sigh, as if accepting she had no chance of stopping me. Which was fair, she didn't. "So, what is it this time?"

I told her. "I want Mom to come visit for the Winter."

* * *

><p>I've been wanting to do this arc for a while.

I think you all know what's coming next.

Also, lots of implied shipping, even though I don't normally do this. I figure, of all times, the Mating Season would be the time to do it.

11. Chapter 11

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Well, I was preparing to being unable to write for a few days. As it turns out, I'm still able to continue my average 5 day posting sessions. Anyways, I do hope you guys enjoy this story arc, I've been planning for this since chapter five of the last story.

Also, I'm impressed by how the last chapter's reveiw counts turn out. I hope that you guys keep telling me your thoughts.

* * *

><p>"Milady, are you sure about this?" the Gronckle dared to ask. He backed away from me, knowing full well that even his armored hide could only protect him so much.<p>

"Yes, I am sure," I growled. I ought to rip his head off, this matter was importantâ€| but I shouldn't. No, that would be an even bigger waste of my time. That was clear to me when I found my glare alone was enough to send him cowering to the corner. "Just go tell Flailing Tail to resume his normal patrols."

"Thank you, Flight Commander Deadwings, thank you!" He said as he approached, obviously thinking to lick my feet.

I scowled at him. "Leave!" I shouted, sending the Gronckle flying away in a panic.

I sighed, this happens every Winter. The whole Nest gets so careless, so confounded and addle minded they can't even focus the most simple of were only two weeks into Winter and everything had already fallen apart. My Knights had practically abandoned me and went chasing after mates like a certain brother in law of mine once did.

With the Gronckle gone, I sighed and turned my attention skyward up at the stars. Atop this scattered cliffside, there were no distractions to interrupt me, no trees in my wayâ€| and nobody beside me. I was alone, that I finally understood.

My sons had no love for me, for I have done them great wrongs, both my eldest and youngest. My former mate would have nothing to do with me, especially once he found out that I nearly slain him once or twice. And the only Kindred who I knew could have consoled me had perished when his connection to our Lord had been severed.

It should be a sign of weakness to desire companionship. Such things, I should be above.

And yet, here I am, longing for the days when my youngest would be cheerily looking up at the heavens, telling me the hour and naming stars for the heroes he wanted to become.

I seek to know what has happened to my eldest since I had last seen him. How has he taken to inheriting what was his? Does he still hate me for it? Did I make the right choice?

Even moreâ€¦ I remember _his _warm embrace.

I snorted; it was only the Winter season getting me, pulling at my heartstrings like only so much sinew. These past few was the time when my Kin did their mating dances and their ceremonies. In the next month, the birthing and child rearing rites would begin. It was only natural, that even I could feel these urgingsâ€¦ no matter, I have suppressed them for nearly fourteen years, I could do fifteen more.

Moreover, I had to stand vigilant, even when the common folk, the peasantry, would be abandoning their posts. These were dangerous times, especially with the Usurper out there. A entire Flight was lost to his machinations, One Eye, perhaps the greatest and the purest of us, had fallen, his Knights defeatedâ€¦ And yet, my Lord does not command the commoners to simply lay their eggs within the sanctity of his Domain. Yes, he warned them, yet he also _encouraged _them to not let their actions be dictated by fear. Now, within the next three days, four-fifths of all of my Kin would be leaving to visit their traditional spawning grounds!

I sighed. Sometimes, I wonder what must go on through my King's head. He was innumerable old and powerful, yet he was trapped here, bound to the island. He was powerful and wise, yet I can't help but feel his decisions make no sense. Attack this fort at this specific time and this specific date, defend for this long, but then send the majority of the populace else where. It is no wonder One Eye spent so much of his time trying to make sense of our Lord's commandments.

***"That is because I you have so much more to learn," **I heard a voice say.

I curly took a bow right from where I stood. "My Lord," I said to the wind. He was not physically here in front of me, no he was still trapped in the mountain behind me; yet I could his presence was upon me. We, Flight Commanders, were entrusted a small portion of our King's power, and with it, a portion his Will always followed us. The Pact that we partook gave us many benefits, among them was the ability to directly communicate with our King as long as we were within his Domain, his Nest. He did not always use this power, but when he did, we felt it. Additionally, it also allowed him to peer into our thoughts, including my discontent with his rule just a

minute ago. "I did not mean toâ€¦"

***"Do not worry, my champion, your concerns are not unfounded,"** I felt him speak. It is a strange feeling, to have someone else speak to you, yet not speak to you. It is not hearing, yet it was listening. Over the years, I have gotten used to my Lord speaking to me in the most unusual of times and circumstances, but I could never fully accept it. ***"Suffice it to say, I have a reason for all my decisions, all of them have a particular goal in mind."**

"Then, what is it you desire, my King?" I asked.

I could almost imagine my Lord's grin, his many rows of teeth gleaming in the darkest recesses of his mind. ***"It is not what I desire, but rather what you desire?"**

His statement only perplexed me. "What do you mean my Lord?"

***"Look at them," **I felt. As if without my own inclination, I felt my neck twisted downward, looking at the small throngs of my Kin below.

The males would try to attract the females in displays of strength or cunning and the females would judge the ones they would follow. Then began a dance and then a chase where the male would try to flirt with his new female. If all went well, a clutch of eggs would be given to them within the week. And yet, I still did not see how this was at all relevant. All I saw was what happened year after year, males chasing after females and sometimes succeeding. "What is it you wish for me to see, my King?"

***"Tell me my Knight, why did you join in my service?" **

I still didn't see what he was getting at, but I felt a creeping cold slithering up my tail, the kind that even weather resistant scales can't seem to keep out. For a moment, I struggled to find the right words as if saying them was the most difficult thing in the world. Finally, I managed to find and speak them, "...To support my child." A child that ultimately broke his own spell without my help.

***"And to one day return to the one you call your mate." **Within my King'sâ€¦ words, I had the distinct impression there was something about my former husband he didn't like. I suppose it was fair, he was a Viking Chief, after all. They would naturally be enemies.

Still, I found myself shaking my head at someone who was not there, yet was. "We both know that the curse upon me is not so easily dispelled."

***"Not by my Will, no. The Corrupt One's curse is not within my power to challenge," **said my Lord. ***"But know that I will still fulfill your request."**

I was stunned. After all these years and all my sacrifices, my Lord was now reminding me of the bargain we had struck so many years ago. Was it because my youngest had left me? Or was it that he finally had the means to fulfill his end of the bargain? A part of me had almost forgotten the terms of our agreement or even that there was one at all. Now, I wasn't sure what to think. "What is do you mean, my Lord?" I asked.

**"I promise to fulfill my promise, for it is the sign of a wise ruler to always pay debts. I assure you, before the Winter Solstice, you shall see your mate and offspring once more," **I heard my King swear.

I gulped. I really hoped my King would not let Stoick see me as I am now. If he saw me as I was, I just knew what he would do to me. I had abandoned him for fourteen winters, made him raise our eldest alone, and joined up with the enemies of our tribe, nothing I could say could excuse any of that. I did all this and more, just because Iâ€¦ I shook my head. Still, the chance to finally set things right, to finally have things the way they should have been appealed to me more than all of the gold that led me down this cursed road. "But so soon, my King? The Usurper is just outside our borders! We need to be ready." I needed to stall, bring more pressing matters to attention.

"He will not be a problem," my Lord assured me. **"Come now, even you can see how feeble you appear to allow one such as him to dictate your actions despite the fact he is not present."**

"I could say very much the same about you, my King," I said to the wind.

My Lord seemed to take my jest well, his massive teeth formed a toothy grin in the back of my mind, despite not being here at all. **"But tell me, if the Usurper was not a concern, would you still be so hesitant? Would you not want to go where your heart calls to you?"**

My heart right now felt like it wanted to crawl into a hole and plug it up. At the same time, the thought of...finally going home filled my thoughts. Images flashed before my eyes, memories of the life I once had, the day I had met the first love of my life, the day I met my husband to be, the birth of my eldest son, Hiccup. All the while, they were joined by new thoughts, new images of what could and will happen; I saw my eldest dawning on a crown like some great and fabled monarch, I saw my youngest becoming a great warrior in his own right no matter what he choose to be...and lastly I saw my husband, just him, standing before me.

I shook my head, dispelling my Lord's illusions. "My Lord, is this wise? Were I to go, Ruseclaw and his Flight would be the only ones left to defend you." Not that I believed the Terror was much of a combatant anyways. He preferred more subtle action and coventness to the use of force. Were the enemy advancing us in numbers, there was little he could really do.

"Ruseclaw has other matters to attend to," **said my Lord. **"He and those of his Flight that remind behind have already left."

"Then who will defend you, my King!?" Maybe a few of my flirting Kin might have turned up to look at me, wondering why I was shouting at the air.

**"You will," **he said, as if that statement should have been obvious in of itself.

All it did was perplex me even more. I know my old home was not all that far away from my King's nest, but still, I didn't see how I was going to defend my Lord's Domain while attending Snoggletog festivities. Oh, has it really been so long since I had ever thought about attending that oddly named holiday?

My Lord, either through his connection with me or because I was simply that easy to understand, seemed to have noticed my confusion. **"Until such a time as I can fulfill part of my bargain, you and what few warriors remain will stay here as my Honor Guard,"** said my King. **"By then, Ruseclaw will have finished his assignment, allowing you to spend the rest of the Winter recuperating."** That at least made sense, I would not be defending my Lord for the whole of the Winter.

I bowed down, at least, now that I knew my Lord's plans for me. I suppose that was it then. My Lord desired to fulfill the pact we had made, then there was little I could do to stop him. At the same time, would I want to challenge what might be the only chance I had to make things right. "Thank you, my King," I spoke.

Then I felt my connection to my Lord waver and unravel as his presence left me. Soon, I was alone once more, but I knew that was only going to be temporary state of affairs.

For a moment, I wondered, just how was my Lord going to complete our pact? His power was enough to bestow boons and blessings upon my Kin, but in the time that I knew him, I had never known him capable of undoing curses or to transform another. Ruseclaw had the power to masquerade as human so long as he wore his enchanted jewelry, but he could never undo my curse. Was there some sort of Rites I had not been informed about? Or was I not noticing something?

For that matter, why would my Lord fulfill his debt to me at a time like this? The Usurper was still a threat, yet my Lord insists on continuing like he was not even there. Why fulfill my debt to me when there could have been other times? Was timing so important? Was he required to fulfill his obligation by a specific point or was he only able to complete it during the Winter?

I ducked my head down and bowed once more, in case my King was listening to my thoughts and would interrupt me. He didn't. I could not hear his not speaking.

Instead, I heard something else, a chaotic gaggle full of shrill and dissonant cries approached me. Raising my head up to see the noise, I found a flock of playing yearlings, yesteryear's babes scurrying through the snow. It always amazed me how normal hatchlings can grow in a year; each was already the size of a skinny human teenager and would only grow from here.

The younger Kin were caught in a foot race, all of them gave shouts of bubbling laughter and dizzying cheers, the same way children always did, regardless of what they were. They were carefree and full of energy with promise behind every step. They listened to no one, followed their own little rules, yet in a way, they reminded me of how my youngest was before he met someone who was now dead to me.

And just as abruptly as the noise came, it stopped. The children

stopped moving, their shouts dying within seconds. One of the children, a young Zippleback skidded to a halt just in front of me, both sets of eyes were transfixed on mine.

Looking around, I saw all of the youngsters holding on to their breath, fearing what I was going to do. I suppose, if there was one thing they had to learn for, they learned about me. I suppose, it is fair, I earned that reputation every time defended my son. Once or twice, I had forced away what I perceived as threats to his safety, no matter what they were.

And yet, what could I really do now? I could maim the two headed Kin in front of me, allow to fully realize that there were dangers in the world that had to be avoided. But at the same time, I was unnerved, afraid of these children's fear. And they were afraid of me.

There was only one thing I knew was to do.

I approached the young, frightened Zippleback, both heads shivering with silent fear. Their eyes drawn closed as I drew closer. And then, I opened my mouth, just as the younger Kindred prepared for the worst. "Tag, you're it." I told one head as I tapped it on the nose with my own. The other head blinked in astonishment and I tapped it as well. "And you're it."

Backing away, I saw that the rest of the assorted crowd give me looks of shock, as if I had ripped apart the young Zippleback one piece at a time. I bet none of them were expecting that, especially not from the scary Flight Commander known for demolishing the King's enemies.

The two heads of the Zippleback were the first to recover from their shock, both obviously considered asking me a question, wondering what they should do. I answered it before they could say a word. "What are you waiting for? You're both 'it'? Understand?"

And then, as if that was all I needed to say, the frantic and disorganized play resumed as if it never stopped. The only change now was that the little Kin were all doing their best to stay as far away as possible from a Zippleback.

As they left. I felt a warmth overtake me, a kind that I had never felt in so long, not since my youngest was still growing up. It felt nice to be a mother, once again. Maybe I should be a little more carefree.

I suppose if my Lord wills for me to return home, I might as well be ready for it. When that day comes, I should appear as Valhallarama, Valka for short, not as Dead Wings.

* * *

><p>I am changing, there is no more denying that. Just over a month ago, when the other members of my Tribe all rapidly descended into dragonhood, I alone was spared with my only burden were a few streaks of reddish scale where tendrils of flame burned into my flesh. I thought that the gods took pity on me, gave me a boon to stand up and fight, or that maybe I was stronger than any foul magic my old friend could bring against me.<p>

I was wrong. Now, I was finally succumbing. The patchwork of scales on my chest were slowly growing, my nails were becoming sharper, more elongated. And I'm pretty sure my eyes were supposed to be a little less yellow. For each day that passes, a little more of me changes. I had no idea what I was going to turn into yet, but pretty soon, maybe before Spring comes...

At least I am not my nephew, things didn't exactly turn out as well for him.

But still, looking at me now, I could perfectly see what I had to lose. Could I even still be Chief once I can't speak Norse? Mildew might use that as an opportunity to have me dethroned if I wasn't too careful. My reputation had taken a small step down once the villagers who had been transformed started hearing strange sounds at the new moon as well as unusual urges to fly off somewhere once winter started.

"Relax, Stoick, you're going to be fine," I heard Gobber say. Then, my best friend then came into view and made me put down the small hand mirror I held onto. "You really should stop looking at your own reflection sometime, it's starting to get creepy."

I slumped my back down on a nearby chair, like the sack of meat like I was. "I'm just worried about making it through Snoggletog without suddenly growing wings and flying off."

"Well, it's not like Gothi predicted you'll die," said Gobber.

I glared at him, but my oldest friend could stand up to them without breaking a sweat. "It might as well be," I said bitterly. Ever since my son went missing, before all this nonsense about Viking turning into dragons started, I've made it a habit of regularly asking for an augury from village elder and I usually heeded her counsel. While I do not know the full extent of the Gothi's capabilities and knowledge, I know for a fact she was good at soothsaying. When, she told me to save Hiccup from Alvin, I did so, even when my enemy was ready to execute him if I dared try. When I had asked if there was a solution to this madness, she pointed in the direction of my sons. Now, this last prophecy, she gave me troubled me to no end.

"So your house will burn down, big deal," assured the blacksmith. "That happens to everyone sooner or later. I'm sure no one even comes close to beating your fourteen year winning streak!"

I really wish I could believe it was just my house burning down, Gothi's ill omen was more complicated. "'A cursed deal struck, a bloody decision made; In the end, a tragedy befalls the Haddock household that day,'" I repeated as clearly as if I was the original source. I wish I could just forget those words, but the thought that I could lose either of my sons was more frightening than any curse and more terrible than any weapon. "'One man, two choices, both led to suffering either way.'" Just how was I supposed to understand something like that, let alone deal with it.

"I'm still pretty sure she means you'll just need to hire a some carpenters," said Gobber. "Besides, I'm you've got other things to worry about."

I nodded my head; Gobber was right, I already had so much to deal

with already. I could worry about some prophesy later, it could come true tomorrow or ten years for all I knew. I had to focus on something more immediate. "How are the boys?"

My best friend's grin threatened to fall off his face. "Pretty good," he said as gestured to the main workshop a block away. Even from here, I could see my sons manning the forges like they were prepared to do a dozen swords. Toothless did all of the hammering, while Hiccup kept the furnace burning. "The lads have been tinkering ever since books they've gotten from the Meatheads.

I nodded. I may have given my sons the permission to study magic, but I still wanted someone I could trust to oversee them when I was not around. Additionally, I still needed a safe place for them to work, somewhere where they could do the least amount of damage while still being productive. Gobber and his forge were fit the bill.. "Are they giving you any trouble?"

The blacksmith simply shrugged. "An explosion here, a weapons rack falling down there..." He said, as if he was noting the kind an unusual, but unimportant event happening while he was doing the laundry.

A saner father might have gotten worried, even afraid for his boys, hearing the kinds of accident that happened around my sons. Me? I have feel more annoyed than anything. "So, the usual?"

"They haven't done that much different from ordinary blacksmithing to be honest," Gobber replied.

"Really?" I raised an eyebrow. I thought weaving a spell was as simple as waving a stick around and wanting something to happen..

"Yeah, mostly, they still just beat metal with the good ol' hammer and anvil," my best friend mused. "Really, aside from carving some runes, there doesn't seem all that much special about what they're doign

I didn't feel all that convinced. "That doesn't sound all that much different," I agree. I mean, if sorcery was that easy, why _weren't _there more people practicing it? I mean, sure people didn't exactly trust most people using that sort of thing, but at some point fear would just get overridden by the desire for power.

My best friend shrugged. "And yet, Hiccup has Toothless inscribing words on a oversized metal plate so people might understand him better."

That really got my attention. I had never really understood Hiccup, not even when he was just an ordinary boy. As a dragon, the problem had only gotten worse because if he wanted to tell me anything, he either needed Toothless or spent so much time just writing out something. "You mean, he'll be able to speak Norse again?" That would be a godsend, like the first real good news I would have in a long time.

"Well, that's what Toothless says it's going to do eventually," muttered Gobber. "Right now, if Hiccup wears that oversized collar he made, all I hear from him is the sound of a rooster crowing and _no

one _understands that."

I smirked, remembering a funny little chat my sons had over breakfast at one. I didn't understand it all, but I knew what having a brother was like enough to see playful teasing when I see , there was a score of twenty-seven to twenty-three. Toothless used to pretend he was a rooster, Val must have had a good laugh. Oh,Val, where have you been? What happened to you?

Gobber continued, freeing me a sea of thought before I fell right in, "And they've made some work on trying to change everyone back!"

Now that was good news. Maybe if my son was successful, he wouldn't need to make some sort of way to let him speak Norse as a dragon. He could be my boy again, maybe even eat properly! "That's wonderful! How far along are they?"

Gobber reached into his pockets and pulled out a tooth, more specifically a small tooth, maybe belonging to a child. "They were able to get this one off of Gustav."

I blinked. That boy, Gustav Larson, was the only one under ten years of age to turn into a dragon, mostly because he wanted to catch a view of the action when the dragons and Outcasts attacked. As a result, he was now! quite large for his age, teeth included. Gobber was holding a human milk tooth, not a vicious, if small, fang. "It worked?"

"Only the teeth," said Gobber in a grave tone.

"Only the teeth," I replied. Now I finally understood why that boy seemed to be so hesitant about leaving his house this past week! It was a good thing he still had plenty of teeth to go through, especially as a dragon.

"Toothless!" Both of us cringed when we realized just how awkward how my youngest son's name became in light of what just happened. "Anyways, your son," Gobber avoid saying his name, "had to remove the talisman to change him back. So, after a little bit of bleeding, he ended up fine."

I nodded. I was a small miracle that most people did not have to experience injuries like that when they became dragons, but then again, neither of my sons had been practicing magic for very long. I was sure, there was bound to be a few mistakes, right? At least, that's what I told myself back when Hiccup started giving people black eyes when he took up crafting weapons. "So how about-"

Before I could finish my statement, I heard two voices shouting at me, each trying to grab my attention. "Chief Stoick! Chief Stoick!" were all I could make out.

Turning around, I found Bucket and Mulch, the two fishermen and sailors I trusted to watch over my sons two weeks ago. "What is it?" I told them once the two of them moved into earshot.

They both stopped, nearly sliding on the frozen icy roadway, panting and sweating despite the temperature being low enough to force tears to freeze. Okay, maybe not that cold, but it sure felt like it. "Trader! Johann! is! here!" Mulch managed to choke out. "I

really need to stop running to deliver messagesâ€|"

I eyed the two of them, a satisfied smile must have crept on my face. Well, at least Trader Johann remembered what I told him last time he came on my island. "You two go ahead, tell him to start selling his wares for me," I said.

Mulch gave a salute and then headed off. Bucke did the same, but he eyed me nervously before he went after his friend, as if I wanted to have him say something. I never understood why, but that man had been mostly silent ever since he came back from the trip. But, it was his business, I suppose.

"You coming?" I asked Gobber. Maybe I could browse for something, maybe a fancy new shield or some fine jewelry. I needed to just relax and enjoy myself a little.

"Not right now," my best friend said to me. "See if you can get him to stay in the harbor til sundown and I'll see about taking the boys along with me. They told me they didn't want many distractions."

I nodded and then went on my way.

Maybe it was good timing Alvin's attack came just within a stone's throw of Winter. If it had happened at any other time, we might have never learned how handy a small crew of dragons aided in maintaining a harbor once the temperature drops below freezing.

Before, ships would be stuck where they were once the surface water became full of near unbreakable sheets of ice. All manner of sea based trade and fishing would slow, then stop altogether, once it became impossible for ships to leave their moorings.

Now that some of us were dragons, that changed a little.

As I climbed down the ramp, I saw a familiar looking Thunderdrum, Roland sitting perched at one of the piers, repeatedly blaring out his house shattering call. Each time he sounded out his call, ice cracked and worn away, the sound just as destructive against ice as much as it was on wood and stone.

Meanwhile, a Scauldron, another unfortunate Victim, blasted away at the cracks with steaming jets of hot water, cutting the ice apart into chunks like some sort of watery saw against wood. Then, a mixed team of dragons of assorted groups, all wearing harnesses with ropes attached, pulled the icy chunk away and dragged it into the open sea where it couldn't bother any of us. Meanwhile, a small team of daring and bold men and women, ordinary humans the lot of them, hammered iron spikes into the ice, so that the process could repeat itself over and over again.

It was a sight to behold, an idea pioneered by my eldest son. The idea was simple, if a little tedious, but I couldn't deny it was handy to have fishing barges working for more days than usual. That and it gave otherwise unemployed dragons a chance to make ends meet, at least until the ice gets too thick and heavy for them; they could clear the entire harbor today, only to have to start over at the next dawn, and it would only get harder the colder things got.

Also, there was the fact that trade ships can now dock in harbor

instead of mooring themselves to the ice flows and forcing anyone wanting to visit to have to trek through dangerous and slippery ice. It wasn't that we, Vikings, minded the extra danger, but sometimes, we just want to go shopping without worrying about slipping and breaking a leg.

I made my way over to Trader Johann's ship, I found my way barred by massive hoard of Viking and dragon's shoppers. I sighed, Snoggletog was upcoming after all; I figure there'd be plenty trying to nab some exotic presents if they had the chance. It was a good thing I was Chief then, there were perks to this job.

I pushed my way through the crowd. "Out of the way, Important Chief business to attend to! Chief of Berk Coming through!" I declared. No one really contested me, though a few were a little upset; I couldn't blame them, but I did have things I needed to do with Johann.

As I got close, I could hear the ship's owner shouting out advertising slogans and fancy sayings like "Snoggletog is my favorite time of the year and Berk is my favorite of all the islands! Celebrate it...with the right presents!" But Trader Johann did not sound like usual enthusiastic self. If anything, he sounded a little afraid.

Once I made my way through the crowd, I saw why. While half the deck was taken up by an assorted crowd of Vikings, the other half was taken up by a particular Zippleback with a particular set of mostly identical twins riding atop the larger dragon's four sets of eyes, they scanned the area, looking for whatever caught their eye.

"Hey, think this will go well with our yak?" I saw Ruffnut grab onto a fancy harpoon with a blue banner near the tip.

"Yeah, how much is it?" her brother asked.

Trader Johann looked nervous for a second, obviously taking into account the Zippleback on his deck. "For you? Just hand me that shield on your back."

"Sweet!" declared Ruffnut. She took off the shield from her brother's back and dropped it onto the deck.

"Hey, that was my shield!"

"Well, now it's Trader Johann's!"

"Then give me that!" snapped Tuffnut as he tried to wrest the harpoon away from his sister.

Mercifully, the Zippleback took the twin away before they could break out into a brawl. I'll admit, Ruffnut and Tuffnut were scary enough on their own, but with a dragon at their beck and call, I didn't know what to think.

Taking a deep breath, Trader Johann then called for the next customer in line to climb onboard. His expression turned into a big grin when he saw me enter. "Chief Stoick, you're here at last!"

I returned his grin. "Well, I couldn't let you offer your wares without stopping by for a visit, now can't I?"

"Indeed, Stoick," the merchant said. He seemed calmer more relaxed, but there was still a little bit of a nervous air about. "Say uh, Chief, why are there umâ€¦ dragons shopping aboard my ship?"

"Oh, well, uh," I struggled to come up with a reply that did not make me sound like I had gone looney. I didn't know where or how far the Trader Johann had been in the past three months, but I wondered if he heard about the any rumor about Hiccup? I'm sure Bertha did her part letting those spread as far as the Northern Wanderers. If Trader Johann didn't know them, well, that made things hard.

The merchant then turned to the crowd gathered outside his boat. "I mean, it's not like I mind serving you scaly friends! I just want to know is all!" Well, that made things easier, it didn't sound like he knew.

"It's complicatedâ€¦" I began. "They're Tribe members."

That cause Trader Johann's eyes to perk up, "Oh, so the war ended? Vikings and dragons are now at peace?" he questioned. "Do I have to start paying attention to what Nadders think are trendy?"

And as if the words summoned her, I noticed Stormfly searching through the clothing section and pulling out a purple frock, looking at it wistfully before putting it aside "You could say that," I mumbled. "I mean...the dragons, they used to be Vikings, ordinary folk."

"What happened?" he said in a confused expression. I couldn't blame him.

So, I told him the condensed version. I told how Hiccup started turning into a Night Fury and that Alvin got hold of a spear and cursed many villagers to turn into dragons. I omitted certain parts like how Toothless used to be a Night Fury or the fact that several of the dragons were really disguising themselves as humans, mostly because that was something that shouldn't be discussed in public. At the same time, the merchant still did his bartering and trading, sending customers, human and dragon alike, on their way.

Once I was done, Trader Johann just blankly stared at me, as if I had said something that rattled him to the core. He was silent, deep in thought. "Anyways, first it was Hiccup, then suddenly people started changing all over the place."

"I seeâ€¦" Trader Johan mumbled to himself. Then, as if it was the only thing his head could latch upon, he said, "Your tunic seems tight on youâ€¦"

I glowered. I know that I was past my prime, but still, I wasn't getting fat was I? No, I had more problems than worrying about sudden obesity. "Don't mention it," I told the man.

Shaking his head, as if to change his train of thought completely, the merchant then said, "Hiccup must have been through quite an ordeal."

"It wasn't all that bad," I said. "Now he spent his free time doing stunt flying with his little brother."

"I suppose..." Trader Johann then gave me a frightened look, as if he knew something, but was too scared to speak it. "Still, can't imagine how this mess all started," he said.

Maybe I was a little more suspicious of people once my sons told me the truth, but I had to wonder if the merchant had played a part in any of this mess. Then again, I can't really go around suspecting everyone around me to have the power to throw lightning around or harbor magical text books; I wasn't that paranoid. Not yet. I didn't press the man any further than I needed to. "I can't either," I said.

"And I don't understand how Alvin could muster a small army like he did, especially after you broke his Outcast Island."

I nodded in confirmation. It was the one thing about Alvin's attack that bothered me more than the fact the Outcasts were taking advantage of the fact that their leader can turn people into dragons. Where did he get all of his men?

Then out in the distance, I saw another ship approach. "Hm, I wonder who that could beâ€|" said Trader Johann.

Taking out a spyglass Hiccup had made for me so long ago, I was able to tell who that vessel belonged to. "A Bog Burglar," I said. "Bertha's kid."

I really hoped she was here just to see Toothless.

* * *

><p>For those of you who are concerned about Val's characterization here, keep in mind this story was written before the second movie came out. Aside from that, she's obviously got a vastly different experience in comparison to what happened there.

For those of you wondering why Gustav suffers losing teeth and how it affected him when his teeth became those of a human, this is to highlight just how crude Hiccup and Toothless's understanding of transformation is as well as the uphill battle trying to undo a curse is. One spell is forcing him to become more dragon, another is trying to revert him back to human. Of course there's going to be mess ups.

The prophecy I decided to throw in as an overt foreshadowing method. As it is written, it foretells of events that will be revealed to you in time. Pay very close attention to the wording when you think it'll be fulfilled.

12. Chapter 12

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

So, another chapter.

**This one is important because it finalizes the scenarios we're

looking for this "Snoggletog" Arc.**

Hope you enjoy and leave a comment telling me your thoughts.

* * *

><p>Enchanting items appeared to be so easy back when I was just copying the directions off of a book. Inventing new enchantments was hard. At first, it appeared simple; put a few fancy runes on an item and then suddenly it does something odd. If it was as simple as that, I could finally wear some trousers.

Enchanting something with what is essentially an untested idea had very unpredictable results. Apparently, you had not only to have very good grammar, but you had to understand what is it you want to accomplish. So not only did you have to know the right words to make a flaming sword and have it not melt itself, but you also had to actually know by what processes the fire burns and what is it that stops the sword from melting beyond saying 'because I want it to'.

It's no wonder magic is so rare and the only people I know that bother to practice it are well past their prime. Not only did you have to develop the talent, being any good at it required justâ€¦ so much work. Really, it all comes off as just impractical. Why did anyone bother inventing this stuff?

I sighed. I feel like sometimes, every time Toothless and I made some progress forward, all we're really doing is running in place. At this rate, I'll never have the chance to get Mom home for Snoggletog. Unless I wanted to ask her over while she could breathe fire; that would have been an awkward conversationâ€¦

But I wondered, did all of the complications of making an enchant come if all we wanted to do was copy someone else? Well, we were about to find out. "Alright, Toothless, just put it on the string," I told my brother. "And give it to Meatlug."

"Right!" declared my brother. He was very chipper as of late, but that's how he always got when we were at the forges; he loved working with fire almost as much as he liked our daily flying sessions.

It was time for another test, another shot in the dark at trying to understand what little we understood. Already, my brother and I have done what we could about learning those afflicted who became dragons. Now came time for a different approach, using someone who was by nature dargon.

Toothless picked up a finely crafted silver pendant, one with some words in a language we didn't speak emblazoned on its front. After the Hairy Scary Librarian translated some things for us, we now knew that it was in Latin, the words being, 'Become as a man'. It was not Norse Rune based enchanting, but maybe this would work. My brother strung the pendant on some wool and then turned his attention to the Gronckle and the large blonde boy in the room.

"I am scaredâ€¦" the larger boy muttered, shaking in his boots.

"Don't worry, Fishlegs," said Gronckle. The boy didn't understand her

words, but he held tightly onto Meatlug, as if he didn't want to let go.

As Toothless came closer, I held my breath. My brother might have made the enchantment, but it was because of my ideas, my crazy person hurting thoughts that he made it in the first place. Yesterday, I thought up of some plan to return Gustav to normal using a modified version of those magic arrows I knew to make; now it's because of me, he won't be eating anything but mashed tuna for a month; good thing dragons constantly replace their teeth...If anything happened to Meatlug, it would add to the growing number of people who trusted me and I had let down.

As the necklace slowly slipped onto the Gronckle's head, I almost wanted to bury myself as she twitched as shook erratically. For a moment, I thought something had gone wrong, but then I noticed that the large dragon was getting smaller, her carapace and wings receding.

Within moments, there was a large brunette girl on her hands and knees.

"Meatlug you're alright!" Fishlegs proudly declared. He was about to hold tightly onto the new girl, but then immediately blushed and dove outside. I didn't blame him. Fear of the dark was one thing, fear of well... Meatlug. Good thing none of our parents were here.

"Fishlegs, why are you running? Did something go wrong?" asked the concerned former Gronckle as she tried to feel for any differences.

"No, everything's perfectly fine," I said. I, too, wanted to go run off, but I stood my ground. All I needed to do was pretend I was looking at something else, like the furnace on the otherside of the room. "Just go change and see Fishlegs."

"Back into my true self?" said the former dragon. "Or into my skirt and tunic?"

"Whichever," I said, not looking at her directly. I breathed a sigh of relief when I heard Meatlug step away and a door slamming somewhere else across the room.

Surprisingly, Toothless also looked away from the former dragon. Come to think of it, these days, I think my brother didn't need much coaching about being well, human. "So it worked," he said in an almost monotone voice that barely disguised his concern.

I nodded. We probably would have been more excited that nothing bad happened, but none of us were ready for Meatlug. "And Meatlug's not a Gronckle," I confirmed.

"So does that mean we can make amulets that turn dragons human?" my brother questioned.

"Apparently, it's easier than the other way around," I said. I really hope that that relative unfairness gets sorted out eventually. I would like to believe the whole of Midgard wasn't completely biased. Then again, Odin had to take pity on men before they even knew how to

feed themselves...

My brother shook his head. "I'm still not getting all this sorcery stuffâ€¦I mean we spent _days _trying to fix Gustav, only to fail at it, but we turned Meatlug human in an under two hours."

"I think it's because we had something to learn from," I told Toothless as I pointed my snout at a nearby table. On it were a pair of amulets much like the one my brother had forged for the former Gronckle. One of them was damaged, the magic within it completely burning it away.

Maybe it had to do with us not using our own understanding to fuel our magic, but rather trusting in someone else's to see us through. Maybe that's why we were able to make potions that slowly corrupted men into dragons or create spell distorting arrows despite not knowing what any of the words or symbols used meant. While the words used to tell us what to do were in a familiar language, the actual things written to empower these things were all in a language that was neither Norse nor Latin, yet we could still craft these very sigils and something maybe our understanding was flawed from the beginning _because _we didn't know what we were doing and that had unintended consequences. Either way, we now knew how to turn dragons into men using a few ounces of silver and some yak hair.

This would all be easier if only we had a tutorâ€¦ or I had hands.

"Soâ€¦" I heard another voice enter the room. It was Gobber. "Is there any reason why Fishlegs was trying to throw himself into a well?"

"I don't know, he just ran out," replied Meatlug, also entering with her clothes thankfully on. I know it's a little crazy of me to worry about something , but I had the distinct idea Dad would chew me out if he knew we forgot to drape Meatlug in a towel before well, that happened. I mean, I haven't worn anything for two months and no one called me out on that, but I guess that might count as a perk of being a dragon.

Gobber just shrugged, as if he wasn't really all too concerned. "Alright, lad, you better get in before you catch a cold," he said to someone behind him. Fishlegs was covered by a white thick bird of frost. "I know Vikings don't get sick, but you never struck me as all that Viking."

"I...am...a...Vikingâ€¦" Fishlegs insisted, shivering. I think he was regretting running out.

"Really now?" said Gobber as he slapped my best friend in the back and pushed him into the room. "Gee, all this time, I thought you were a Gronckle who walked on two legs..."

"I...wouldn't object to that..." said Meatlug.

Gobber gave the girl a knowing smile, aware of her big secret because Dad had to trust someone. "Well, I take everything went well."

Toothless just had this big grin on his face, like he was feeling

smug about his own handiwork. I couldn't blame him, I probably would have looked much the same, if anything I ever made worked out all that well. "It did!" he declared, holding up the two amulets from the table. "Our first big success!"

"Jewelry that turn dragons into teenagers, what is this world coming to?" Gobber muttered, his voice tired and weary as if he was suddenly older and more exhausted he actually was, but not in a regretful way.

"Well, Toothless still has that cloak his grandad gave him," said Fishlegs. "It could turn him into a Night Fury like he did back when Alvin attacked."

"No, I don't!" Toothless insisted, before amending. "It's broken, doesn't work anymore."

"Well, then maybe you can fix it," suggest Gobber. "I mean, maybe you can get a seamstress to make the cloth parts and then do whatever that fancy hocus pocus you boys are trying to pull."

"I guessâ€|" Toothless said, almost like he wasn't all too keen on it.

I jumped into the conversation, once I realized that maybe now we had an understanding of well, how runes worked, maybe now was a good time to try and fix that old family heirloom. "Hey, Toothless, don't you want to come flying with me?" It wasn't an invitation to climb on my back, like it might have been under normal circumstances.

I saw the lights in his head go up, as if he was thinking on it. Now I had his attention. "Flying, together?" he said absentmindedly.

"Flying, separately," I corrected. "You wouldn't have to be on my back anymore. You'd have your own wings."

"My own wings," my brother said, taking a glance at his back. He still sounded a little hesitant, maybe thinking about his old teacher.

A part of me feltâ€| guilty doing this and maybe I was being a littleâ€| insistent on the whole cloak thing, but it was the only way I knew to reallyâ€| fix things. The thing I hated most about this situation was that my brother and I wereâ€| different. As long as I have known my brother was my brother, neither of us really _stood as equals. _

Because I was no longer human, I couldn't craft things anymore, the best all I could really do was give advice and keep the fire burning, not hammer away steel with my hands or place delicate springs and string in machinery. I couldn't draw or write with a charcoal pen or inscribe fine details on paper without great difficulty. I was a world away from the rest of Berk, not even allowed to speak to all but a few of my most trusted friends and even then, some of them still never knew what I wanted to say.

Because Toothless was no longer a dragon, he was stuck riding on me; while it's been more enjoyable for both of us ever since I got my saddle, there were still limits that I just knew we couldn't break.

Neither of us could race on another, try to outdo each other in a contest of our prowessâ€¦ Ironically, I think that was the one thing that still made me, well, a Viking; I wanted to challenge him, not because I wanted to prove I was better, but forâ€¦ the sport of it.

Right now, with all the things we had, I saw that while I couldn't make myself human, at least not yet. Turning Toothless back into a dragon, seemed far easier to do. And he wouldn't even need to give up being able to use his hands! He'd be so lucky. Way better off than I had ever beenâ€¦ and I think I was fine with that. I'd give near anything to not be the only Night Fury.

Now, all I had to do was say the right words. "Please, bud," I appealed. "Do it, for meâ€¦"

When I said that, I saw Toothless's expression changed into something between annoyance and longing. "Well, I guess if it means I can outgrow riding you," he muttered.

I felt my teeth extend and my mouth turn up into that silly looking grin my face did sometimes. I was overjoyed. Maybe Mom would like to see how my brother has changed, but then again, I hadn't exactly told him I was going to go see her once I had a working way to cure her.

Toothless turned back to Gobber, who just stood there, mostly listening in with Meatlug translating for him and Fishlegs. "Alright, uh, Gobber," said my brother. "Go tellâ€¦ whoever you think might be best for that job, then."

"Well, he's closed right now," said our teacher, looking out of the forge. The sky was darkening, with only a small part of it still appearing to be bright and warm. If I could whistle, I probably would have done that. I forgot that with Winter upon us, the days were becoming so much shorter.

"Oh well, I'll tell him in the morning," our blacksmithing master had said. "I just hope you boys don't do something crazy like try to make a dozen of those cloaks to turn everyone into dragonsâ€¦"

As soon as he said that, something, another crazy idea, dawned on me. Well, I wasn't thinking about turning people into dragons specifically, but still, it inspired me. All around me, I saw articles of clothing or jewelry used to turn people into something else. I wondered, what if that clothing could do a something other than turn a person into a dragon? What if the reason the arrows never worked was because they kept burning themselves out, trying to break a curse with a single strike?

Before I could think about it even further, Gobber's voice snapped me back to reality. "And that reminds me, about a half hour ago, I told your father that I'd wait for sundown before letting you fellas know Trader Johann has arrived!"

I blinked, faintly remembering that it has been a while since the merchant had been in Berk. Of course, he had to come back eventually for the Winter season; I think his sales were much higher than normal when there was a pressing need for people to buy things.

"Wait, Trader Johann is here!" excitedly exclaimed Fishlegs, as if he was about to experience the most important moment in his life. "Oh, oh, maybe he has my new botany book!"

"Another book?" Meatlug frowned.

"And who's this Trader Johann?" asked my brother.

"Oh, no one important," I said. Just the reason we're all in this mess together, but most people here didn't need to know that. "He's a friend. He visits the island every now and again, offering things in exchange for something you have."

Toothless and Meatlug both seemed to understand. Dragons didn't exactly have what Vikings would call an economy, since none of them really understood the concept of well, owning anything except for land. But, they still exchanged goods and services, traded things amongst themselves. "Oh, I see," Meatlug said. "Well, I guess it couldn't hurt to meet him."

Fishlegs said, "Hey! Maybe we can get you a nice poem book!"

"A book on poetry?" Meatlug mused. I knew she didn't particularly care much for books, but I think she was interested in learning poetry even from a book. "Viking poetry?"

"Uhuh!" Fishlegs said, nodding his head as if this was the most important moment of his life. Before I knew it, both of them stepped out the forge, discussing of things that they might be willing to get while aboard the merchant's ship.

"I wonder if I could get something for her there," muttered Toothless.

"Who's 'her'?" I asked. This was the first time I ever heard of him considering a girl. Then again, it was going to be Snoggletog in a month. Maybe he was getting something for someone? Well, I had to spent a few hours trying to explain to him not to try getting gifts for everyone, so maybe he was focusing on getting a gift to one of the girls we knew.

Toothless didn't answer my quest, infact, he outright denied me. "I didn't say anything!" So maybe he was planning something, I wonder who. Maybe it was Astrid or Meatlug? Alternatively, it could be something for Mom, maybe a peace offering.

Gobber laughed. Maybe he also heard Toothless's little slip of the tongue. "Well, you boys have fun now. I bet Trader Johann will be amazed to see you two!"

I owed it to the merchant to tell him came of my researching the book he gave me. I wonder what he'd think seeing me now as dragon, more powerful yet simultaneously more capable and limited at the same time. He'd probably think I'd gone mad if I wasn't several meters tall and could breathe fire.

I gave my brother a big grin as I walked outside, hoping maybe he'd lean or maybe hitch ride on my back. "You coming?" I asked Toothless.

"Yes," he said. Then, he took his walking stick and stepped right on out, a distinct satisfied air about him. "But I'm leading the way."

* * *

><p>I think the satisfied grin on my face annoyed Hiccup. I mean, how could it not? I've pretty much figured out to avoid that little teasing gesture he liked to pull. All I needed to do was just find a wooden stick and use that to take some of the pressure off my bad leg. Suddenly, I was a little more independent, enough that I didn't need my older brother carrying me around everywhere again and my leg was just going to get even better. Maybe by Snoggletog I could finally stop having him worry if I broke a leg with every step I took.<p>

I lead my brother the way to the harbor, carefully climbing down the loading ramps to avoid slipping on the assorted trails of frost. I felt accomplished. How could I not? I made something work. Father would be so proud to know and maybe, no, I was just copying off of someone else and it was my brother's idea. She'd attribute the accomplishment as Hiccup's doing, I was sure of it.

The loading ramps were surprisingly full, despite how dark it was about to become. Like amongst the dragons, the human way of life took drastic changes once things went below freezing. Agriculture was impossible and commerce wound down to only the barest essentials. Everyone stayed in doors unless they had no other choice and most people suddenly had a strange combination of so much free time yet all they could really do was stay huddled up by the least, that's how it appeared to me. Berk for the most part seemed fairly emptyâ€|

Unless Snoggletog was involved. Whenever anything, and I mean anything, so much as had a loose connection the upcoming festival, it seemed like the whole village didn't even seem to notice the fact that several doors were held shut by several dozen pounds of snow or that the temperature should be causing their toes to fall off. There was a strange and almost eerie vitality to the village, like the very idea of the holiday kept a man as warm as a dragon's insidesâ€|

That thought led to a completely separate and very loosely related tangent. I turned to Hiccup, who was taking extra care to make sure his tail wasn't going to be sending anyone flying because of a wrong turn. It was funny the first time, but I don't think anyone appreciated it. I couldn't help but feel how lucky my brother was. He didn't have to worry about injuries keeping him down for months or worried about how cold his insides were; even without the potion letting him heal from just about anything, he was still tougher than me. And on top of that, Father seemed to really care for him growing up, even though he was a little distant; Mother was only distantâ€|

Maybe I am being a little jealous, self-centered. I mean, I practically gave up being a dragon even when I had so many options to change back. I had to deal with the consequences of thatâ€| but that last one had nothing to do with being a dragon. It was so unfair.

As soon as I thought that, I managed to slip and fall into a snowbank, face first, the cold white powder softening my fall.

"Hey, bud, are you alright?" asked Hiccup.

"Fine," I said bitterly. "Just peachyâ€|" At least nothing felt broken.

My brother's concern suddenly changed into an expression of pure glee. I guess if I was fine enough to make sarcasm, I wasn't hurt. He gave me a big slobbery lick.

"Ew, gross." I groaned. I just hope no one is around there to see that. There is no way I'll ever get used to having my older brother lick me like that. Flying is one thing, but this was just embarrassing. _I_ picked myself off the ground, not Hiccup, and dusted the snow from my coat; I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of letting me use him to stand, not after what he just did to me. He knows just how much that bothers me.

Wiping the Night Fury drool and snow off my face, I saw that neither Fishlegs nor Meatlug were paying any attention to us. They were a bit farther along, still chatting about poetry and books and all those strange terms they thrown around like 'Toughness eight', 'Speed twenty' or whatever 'acoustics' was. Now, I liked reading books and listening to songs just fine, but not like those two.

Past them, I could see that that the piers closest to the new ship was full, crowded to the point that I had a hard time imagining the pier could even support the weight of all these Vikings. Infact, I couldn't see the new ship at all, there were just too many people and I wasn't exactly the tallest guy on Berk. The only thing I was really sure about was that there was a man somewhere nearby shouting catch phrases, invitations to trade. Whoever this Trader Johann was, he certainly appeared to be popular this time of year.

Thinking on it, I had no interest staying in line and I feared if I didn't get in there then and now, there might not be anything left. I was the son of the Chief after all, that had to have perks. "Right, let's go," I told my brother as I moved to get in line. Not join the end of the line, no, I wanted to squeeze my way through. At least I tried to at any rate, there was a force pulling at the lower part of my trousers, keeping me me from even attempting. "Hiccup, come on, let me through," I told him.

"It's rude to cut in line. ," he told me, letting go of my pantleg and looking me in the eye. "We can wait."

"They're justâ€| common folk," I said with a frown. He brings this up now? "We're sons of the Chief, we do have certain privileges."

"That doesn't mean it's not rude," he insisted.

I scowled at my older brother. I didn't see why he was even bothering. I didn't really know these any people, other than they served our Father. It should have been only natural to us to take advantage of that. If no one else liked that, well, that was their problem. "Fine," I told my brother. Except that it wasn't.

"Good," he said. It was his choice, but not mine and I knew if I tried to make a break for it, he'd catch me.

Which is why I took advantage of his one blind spot. Night Furies don't really have one, not like most dragons, but my brother on the otherhand... "Hey, is that Astrid?" I declared and pointed off somewhere behind him.

Immediately, my brother's face turned pale, as if he had suddenly become a livesized snowman. dragon, whatever, of himself. He immediately became trying to shaking his body, trying to toss any excess snow away and began licking himself clean. "How do I look? Am I presentable?" he questioned, mostly to himself. He always tended to act funny whenever I brought up Astrid. A while back, he told me he was trying to do what he called 'giving up on Astrid', but no matter what he said, his actions said otherwise. I didn't understand any of it, but I suddenly found myself with a new way to distract Hiccup.

Snickering to myself, I dove into the massive crowd of people while Hiccup was distracted. "Excuse me, pardon me, Chief's son coming through!" It was surprisingly easy, given how big and tightly packed and chaotic everyone was. No one bother stopping me, either, which I felt that was fitting. Then again, I wasn't the largest guy on Berk either. I guess being small had some advantages, too.

Pushing myself through the disorganized mob, I found myself looking squarely at the spiny tail of the Nadder, except it didn't belong to a dragon. Astrid stood right in front of me, patiently waiting a few yards away from the rest of the line. Approaching her was a particular Nadder in human form, Stormfly. "So, how'd it go?" Astrid asked her.

As soon as I Stormfly, I panicked and immediately began trying to check if my hair was neatly combed or if I some of my brother's drool still on me; I don't want her to have an obvious way to jab me in the. I didn't normally do this, but I secretly begged Odin, Thor, and Baldr to have pity on me and not have her notice me.

So far, she didn't. "Too expensive," Stormfly murmured. "

Astrid shrugged. "It's that time of year," she said in the dragon language. "Things are more expensive because people want them."

"I suppose," mused Stormfly. "Really, unfortunate I wanted that dress."

"You'll get other chances," assured Astrid. And then pointed out to the distant horizon, past all of the dragon and human 'icebreakers' my brother hired. There was a ship, a very familiar looking ship off in the horizon, just barely visible against the darkening sky. "Hey, you see that?"

"Hey, isn't that Camicazi's?" asked Stormfly.

"Bingo."

Now I was really hoping I didn't look like a Night Fury slobbered all over me. What would Camicazi think if he saw me right now, walking using a staff like some decrepit old man? Stormfly gave me a hearty laugh that lasted several minutes when I showed up brandishing my staff, I didn't want anyone else to laugh at me like that. Maybe it'd be better if I slinked away, leaved before making a fool of

myself.

And just at the same time, others began noticing. The crowd around me turned their attention to the oncoming ship and stood in place. Oddly enough, a tightly packed and still mass of Viking bodies was harder to move through than when it was all moving in a semi chaotic fashion; I tried to slip back, but I was trapped where I was. They weren't so much as panicking, so much as they stood their ground.

"Bog Burglars!" said one man.

"Incoming ship!" said another.

"Alright, alright, everyone, settle down now!" I heard my father shout. "We've got a visitor incoming, so you all need to be on your best behavior!" The crowd murmured, but they listened. "Now, someone get me my sons!"

"Overhere!" Then, I suddenly felt a force behind me push me into view. Now I was really regretting 'exercising my rights'.

My back then went straight as if it was made from a steel rod, my footsteps had the sort of heavy stomping that came naturally to people about five times my size. At least, that's what I hoped I looked like. "Present!" I said, trying to feign as much bravado as I could. I didn't want to look weak, not with Stormfly here and Camicazi coming my way.

I could swear I still see Stormfly giving me a snicker in the corner of my eyes.

"And where's Hiccup?" asked my Father.

My brother came swooping down from overhead, a short glide over the crowd and he landed on the other side of the pier, which was mostly empty save a few boxes and nets. "I'm here!" he roared. No one needed to know what he said to understand him.

"That's Hiccup?" I heard the man standing next to my father question. He strangely reminded me of Trader Al, the human guise that the Terror Flight Commander used in the King's service. Was this Trader Johann?

For a moment, my brother seemed to enjoy his flashy entrance, but one absent minded flick of the tail sent a pile of crates down into the water. "Uhâ€¦| sorry!" my brother.

"So that is Hiccupâ€¦|" muttered the man near my Father.

Father nodded. "Alright, step forward you two."

We did so. Camicazi's ship was still a fair distance away, but I knew it'd be docking

"And you must be Toothless?" question the man. He seemed a little nervous, like I was. "Never knew you had two sons Stoick."

I nodded, nervously. Hopefully, he wasn't a dragon in disguise who wanted me dead. It wouldn't surprise me if he was, but I can't go

thinking about that about every merchant I meet.

"Well, I didn't either," said Father.

By the time the ship docked, the pier had been hastily swept of any unsightly debris and a small entourage of warriors circled around me and my family; closest to us were Astrid and Stormfly, unofficially, co-opted as our 'shield maidens' despite the fact neither of them had any of those on. Hiccup and I both flanked out Father's sides and I could tell he was nervous about something, just I didn't know what.

As for me, I had my own worries to think about. I felt like biting my own teeth off when the boarding plank came down. I really hope none of the girls next to me would think too poorly of me. And keeping my back like this was starting to wear on me.

Hiccup had his too, but all I could see was him trying to glance at Astrid every few seconds.

One warrior woman, a Bog Burglar who was probably old as my father was the first to leave, a scroll in front of her. She recited a line from it, "Introducing, Ca-

Or at least she would have if she were not interrupted. "Yeah, yeah. We can skip that part you old nanny," said a shrill, very accented voice. "I'll introduce myself." The warrior woman stepped aside, obviously frustrated, revealing a girl that might have been Astrid's exact double if she wasn't part Nadder. "I am Camicazi!" she said as stepped off her own ship. "And you all know me Mum as Big Bobbied Bertha, Head of the Bog Burglars!"

"And we welcome you ashore," said my Father, a small grin threatening to come out from his neutral expression. "Tell me, lass, what brings you

Camicazi's boundless smile widened. "Just seeing some friends!" I don't really know what happened, but I suddenly felt like my Father's body seemed to loosen, become less rigid. "Maybe do a little shopping for the Winter festivals."

Trader Johann gave a nervous expression, clearly he was unnerved by the sudden arrival of the blonde girl, but he was still being polite. "You Bog Burglars are always welcome aboard my float!" He stammered. "You are such valuable customers."

"Thank you," cheered Camicazi. "But maybe later, I've got to see my friends first." Trader Johann nodded, as if he was only agreeing because he didn't want to offend the Bog Burglar. I guess he was afraid of someone who could rob him while blind; she wasn't called a Bog Burglar for nothing.

Father turned to Hiccup and me and I wanted to go do something crazy and impossible like hide until someone's helmet. "Then, I'll leave her to you."

"Thanks, Father," I stammered. "Hey Camicazi," I tried to say to her.

About the same time as Father left, the rest of the Viking crowd went

back to their business. They either went home because of how late it was getting.

Astrid and Stormfly shared the same greeting, mostly because Astrid can't speak Norse these days.

Hiccup at least didn't seem all too worried about the new arrival. Maybe I should let him do the talking, I mean, he needed someone to translate for him, right?

"Hey, why don't you come aboard, where we can have some privacy?" suggested the Bog Burglar.

Maybe if most of us hadn't spent a month trapped in the same cell with her, we might have been a little scared or hesitant, but we knew the Bog Burglar enough to trust her. We accepted, though a part of me wondered why the secrecy. We all allowed ourselves to board the Bog Burglar vessel and we followed our host into hold. None of Camicazi's crewwomen were in sight, leaving us perfectly alone in a dim lit room.

"Well, how have you been?" She asked us once we were settled in.

We all gave a few statements, mostly reflecting on what's changed, all things she could have seen for herself, but I guess that was all part of politeness. I showed Camicazi my walking stick, thankfully she didn't laugh, Hiccup now constantly wore his saddle, and Astrid was turning into a Nadder.

"Gee, Astrid, it's just like your dream!" Camicazi cheered.

"Just coincidence. I mean, I should have known I was a little more vain than most people." Astrid glowered at the Bog Burglar, but no one else in the room seemed to know what they were talking about.

"If by little, you mean that you punch anyone who even suggests you wear something that you aren't allowed to fight in," said Hiccup.

"Yeah, just like this!" Astrid jabbed my brother in the jaw and almost landed a blow on me if I didn't back away in time.

Hiccup grunted a little, but overall, I didn't think Astrid hurt him as much as she should have. Then again, Astrid didn't seem too serious about it. "Are you sure the potion made you stronger? Because I'm not feeling it!" That earned him another smack.

Stormfly and I took turns translating for the two of them, mostly because Camicazi was the only one in the room who didn't understand the dragon language. "So I guess he's glutton for punishment?" mused Camicazi. "For a boy and a dragon, I guess that's not too bad."

After a few more punches, Astrid then stopped. "That was for opening your big mouth."

Hiccup licked a section of his forearm. I guess even his ability to rapidly heal didn't make him immune to getting hurt. "I don't regret it!"

"So anyways, after I heard about what happened on Meathead Island," Camicazi grinned. "About how the brave and bold Heirs of the Haddock clan, challenged a Whispering Death and beat him." The way she explained it made me wish I could puff up my shoulders and flex my muscles and actually impress someone. "I've been wondering do either of you boys have any Quests you got planned during the winter."

"Not really" I said.

"We sort of do" murmured my brother.

"We do?" I asked. "What's it about?" Stormfly and I leaned closer to him as if we wanted to hear him more clearly. Camicazi stayed put and waited for someone to translate and Astrid just gave Hiccup some sort of stare.

"I" Hiccup tried to say and he didn't seem to have an easy time saying it. Was this Quest troubling really so troubling?

"You can tell us," I assured him.

"It's about Mom" he said finally.

I just stared.

"I want to bring her home for the Winter"

I still continued to stare. For a moment, it felt like I wasn't even in my own body. I was just not there.

"Toothless?"

"Are you out of your mind!?" I shouted. My outburst stopped all conversation for a few solid minutes. Never in my whole life have I felt so betrayed, especially not by him of all people. There was no way I wanted her to come to Berk, not after all the things I had to go through, not after the things my brother went through in her care. She'll just wreck the place or maybe cull the cattle or something. I wouldn't want her near any kids or even any grown Vikings!

"So do you have a quest or not?" question Camicazi, appearing a little sheepish.

Stormfly and Camicazi didn't so much as move their heads, they saw I had strong feelings on that so-called quest.

"We don't," I said, closing that door.

Camicazi shrugged, her composure regained. "Well, in that case, I've got a Quest you all might be interested in."

"About what?" asked Stormfly.

Camicazi scanned her cargo hold, as if she was making sure there wasn't anyone else listening in. "I know where Alvin the Monstrous is"

* * *

><p>Hiccup obviously has his problems and well, learning something without a tutor is a nightmare if it's that complicated. Still, he's the one doing all the thinking and planning, Toothless just does the labor.

****Here we see a fundamental difference between Hiccup and Toothless. I've explored a little bit about it in the previous story, but this is a character trait that is worth expressing. Hiccup thinks about other people, even total strangers and considers them. Toothless doesn't, he's way more self-centered.****

****Also, the two of them have their first real dispute. This shakes things up a bit.****

13. Chapter 13

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****I will neither confirm nor deny the Berserkers will be involved later.****

****I also don't understand what you are trying to ask me about Marco. If you would, can you please clear things up.****

****But anyways, those of you guys who have guests accounts, I wish I could directly reply to your questions to ask you what you're referring to.****

****Anyways, great turnout for last chapter, here's the next.****

****Please enjoy and leave a reveiw when you're done.****

* * *

><p>"I know where Alvin the Monstrous is," repeated the Bog Burglar.<p>

The room kept silent, all of us considering my words.

I could see that 'Toothless' was shaking in his boots. I suppose even a cowardly or undeserving Kin had a few moments of real glory and bravery in their lives; that whole incident a few weeks ago might have been a fluke for all it did. Then again, he never was one of us, was he? It was so easy to think of him as human, as one of them; he has taken to his true nature all too well.

For me, it was a much simpler matter; I saw a chance for revenge, perhaps even more, a chance to win back some of what I lost and to pay my debts all at once... Now, Camicazi had my full attention. I felt my hands dance anxiously by the blade by my side, the thought that maybe I could drive it down this Alvin's throat pleased me almost as much as it would if I used a volley of spines.

He destroyed much of what I valued after all— The Flight I served was now but a memory. All of its Knights were either slain or taken captive, leaving us lowly Squires with nothing, not even a title or

formality to stand behind; we were on our own.

I saw the chance to return to our Lord, our King in glory.

"What do we have to do?" I said to the Bog Burglar.

Most everyone, especially him, turned to look at me.

"Oh, that's easy, once we get there, Stormfly," Camicazi said. "We'll be robbing him blind."

I frowned. I saw no point to stealing something of his, not when there was something far more important to be taken. "Or we could just end his life," I supplied.

"We couldâ€¦" the Bog Burglar admitted, begrudgingly. "But if notâ€¦"

"Wait, how do you even know where he is?" interrupted the Night Fury in the room, his brother and I supplied a quick translation for Camicazi.

"Oh, I have it on a reliable source that the Outcasts are camping out on some island just past Hopeless Beach!" said Camicazi with a cheer.

"And you're planning to kill...or steal from him?" asked the Night Fury, again.

Camicazi nodded. "That's the idea!"

"That's dangerous," said the Night Fury. "You could all get caught! Do you know even how many guards they have or where the best places to get in and get out alive? Is what you're going to do really worth it?" I had to admit, it seemed hard to believe this one was anything like his brother. He seemed so bold, so willing to challenge, while Toothless was just so scrawny, a little cowardly even. He seemed more like Dead Wing's child than the Night Fury who wasn't. He would have made for a fine Knight. Still, I hated he had a point; that meant that I might lose this fine opportunity.

"Wellâ€¦I suppose my source might not have covered things like...defenses, guard dutiesâ€¦or getaway locations..." Camicazi admitted. "Well, I was thinking of nicking that half-man-half-dragon freak's spearâ€¦Not that you're a freak, Astrid," she hastily added that last part.

"And really, the guy you're up against was strong and tough as my Dad before he became a monster. Now he can break axes apart like he would a twig. You can't really be serious on fighting him!"

I glowered. As if I was going to let myself be defeated by him a second time. I was half starved and trapped like some creature then. This time, I would defeat him.

"So now we know what you think is crazy," my Host said, a slight grin at the Night Fury.

"We both know that what I think is crazyâ€¦ doesn't mean I won't do it," the Night Fury replied. "I just won't do thisâ€¦" My Host

grinned a little from his statement.

"And Hiccup's right," my Host added, her expression turning darker. "It's really risky. Is his spear really that worth it?" I translated for her only because I owed that much, not because I wanted to. I had found it hard to believe Astrid of all humans would not be agreeing with me; she had her own desire for vengeance, surely she would have understood.

"It's what Alvin uses to turn people into dragonsâ€¦" I heard Toothless suggest. Well, he had his uses after all. "I guess, maybe we can use it to stop him from turning more people into dragonsâ€¦or maybe learn something from it."

"We should go, anything to do to hurt this Alvin is to our benefit," I argued. I did not necessarily like backing up the runt, but I needed to do something to convince Camicazi to embark on this so called quest. Besides, even if I couldn't harm this Alvin directly, taking something of his was just as valuable.

"It's on his person, the whole time," argued my Host.

"Then we kill him," I said. I had no qualms about murdering him.

Both the Night Fury and my Host shook their heads, almost in perfect sync.

"You can't kill him," said the Night Fury. "He's way too strong, way too fast."

"Then, you should come, Hiccup! You're way tougher than you used to be." suggest Camicazi. That seemed abrupt, even by her standards. "I mean, you're strong and tough."

"When you want to be discrete?" questioned the Night Fury. "I mean, have you noticed the hard time I had just going down a ladder? Or have you noticed that I had to get new doors installed to walk into my own house? I had problems before I had to worry about my tailâ€¦ now, they're even worse." The Night Fury had a point. Someone as large as him was a risk, a liability. The dark skies were their domain, not a dark corner.

"Then, you shouldn't go," I told him. "Camicazi and I will head to Alvin's fortress and deal with him ourselves."

"Wait, what?" Camicazi sputtered. "Butâ€¦ surely, Hiccup can come!"

"No, we don't," I said. "He is not necessary to our needs."

"Well maybe we can have him cover our rear!" Camicazi suggested. I was surprised why she wanted the Night Fury to come along, but then again there were quite a few uses the extra Breath could lend us. "Maybe he could stay on the getaway barge whileâ€¦"

"I'm not going with you," said the Night Fury, putting an end to that plan. "I don't want you guys to get hurt trying something dangerous...so if it'll convince you guys not to go, I'm going to stay behind..."

"So, you finally take a hint, _genius_?" said my Host, giving the Night Fury a heavy smack to the back.

He gave an awkward looking grin. "Well, I think getting hit in the head a couple hundred of times finally drove the point homeâ€|"

My Host only gave a curt nod. "And just to make it clear, I'm not going either."

"Well...I guess, but we can't exactly run a heist with just two people!" Camicazi said with urgency. I didn't understand that, though. Wouldn't pulling offâ€| whatever we wanted to by sneaking into Alvin's hideaway be easier with _less _people?

"You've got your 'handmaidens'," said my Host. "You can use them!"

Camicazi then gave my Host a look that indicated annoyance, like that was something that obviously couldn't be done. "Only to ferry us!" Somehow, I didn't think any of us bought that, but then again, I still had a hard time understanding why humans bothered with those smelly wooden sheds instead of using bushesâ€|

Still, if she wanted more people, there was someone else who hadn't voiced his opinions. Toothless sat out there, mostly only relaying his brother's words in a mildly upset tone. I could tell he was a still little upset about his brother's plan, though, my King would probably be the only person who knew _why_. Still, I didn't need to understand to know how to use that to my purposes; All I needed to do was say a few words. "But what about Toothless? Would he stay behind and cower or would he fight?"

Now, I had his attention. And as I expected, I knew what would say, I had him at 'cower'. He might have been an entitled weakling, but he was always so willing to face any challenges offered to him. He stood up and narrowed his eyes at me. "I'll fight, of course."

"Toothless!" warned the Night Fury.

"I'm going," said the younger brother. "Besides, you were willing to see Mother, that's way worse!"

"It's not!" argued the older one. "She justâ€|

"Insane!" said Toothless.

"Neither is breaking into a heavily armed fortress!"

"We both know you'd do the same if you came up with that plan!"

"Only because then, I'd be sure to have a backup plan!"

And for better or worse, I set brother against brother. Maybe, I should have picked someone a little less volatile. But I suppose if worst came to worse, someone who was good at shooting at range might help.

"I still think we need more people..." murmured Camicazi.

"How many more do we need?" I asked the Bog Burglar; I was desperate to go on this Quest. Even if it was just a chance to take something of Alvin's, hurting him was all the more important. Thinking on it, I might not be able to get Hookfang, the entitled lout that he was to come; he had his 'leige' to take care of and I doubted either of them were assets. Barf and Belch were not exactly the most stable and neither were their new friends, also not worth taking. Which left only the bardâ€¦ I suppose she wasn't too bad and that male she hung around might have provided extra muscle if he joined in. At best, I could only offer two more bodiesâ€¦ and they weren't all that suited to sneaking.

"I guess one or two more."

"Great," I told her. "I can arrange for it." Meatlug was hurt quite a bit by our old teacher's death, not as bad as I was, but maybe enough to motivate her to aid me.

The two brothers were still arguing, my Host was between them, stopping them from coming to blows or doing anything other than yell and shout. There were someâ€¦ creative insults, several of which I think I gave Toothless not too long agoâ€¦ My Host spent her spare time glowering at me. Hopefully she forgave me.

"We don't need them," I assured Camicazi.

"I suppose that's all that we need," said Camicazi reluctantly. She clearly wanted the Night Fury to come along for some reason, but there was nothing we could do to force the issue. He was not going to support this, there was no forcing that.

At that moment, my Host thought it would be prudent to let the the two brothers go up to the surface, before their little spat got even more out of hand. Who would have ever guessed that the two of them would be having a little domination contest? But I suppose that's males for you.

I was about to go leave myself, but then I felt something grab onto my hands. "Can you stay a while?" asked Camicazi, holding me back.

Feeling somewhat obligated to heed the command of the one who gave me what I desired, I closed the hatch and climbed back down. "What is it you need?"

"I was justâ€¦ thinking," said Camicazi.

"Thinking what?" I asked. "About the heist? Or..." Whatever it was we were doing if we could kill Alvin.

"Assassination," supplied Camicazi. "But no, I can handle the rest of that on our way over."

"Then, what were you thinking about?"

"I'm not really sure," she gave me a curt little grin. Great, she didn't even know what she was thinkingâ€¦ Well, I suppose I had time to spent on idle gossip, good friends are hard to come by.

Still, she was technically my friend. I refused the urge to just go climb out of the hold. "You wanted me to talk about something you hadn't thought aboutâ€|?"

"Well, no," said Camicazi. She then began looking at the area around us, as if to make sure no one else was listening. "You knowâ€| Toothless is coming along right?"

I frowned. Why were we suddenly talking about him? "Uh, yes, he is," I confirmed. Even if I didn't want him to come; he was just going to drag us down. But I needed him to win support to even launch this little journey.

"I was just wonderingâ€| what you thought about him?" Camicazi asked.

"What I thought?" I repeated. "He became a Squire," I said, anything else might not have been best not said in polite conversation with friends. I mean, I am still a little upset about being detailed for several weeks because of him. I suppose the same can be said for my Host as well as a certain Gronckle, but I settled that account later.

"I seeâ€|"

"Why, what do you think about him?" I questioned.

Camicazi's face turned thoughtful for a moment before answering. "Well, he's not bad, well, for a boy, I suppose." Because for Camicazi, being a female apparently made you inherently just better; I can't say I disagree...

"He's not the best, either," I informed her. And that was just being generous.

"No," she admitted. "You know, I actually once played a game of 'Spin the Bottle' with him when we first met."

"You mean that thing with an icicle?" I questioned. Far as I could tell, the human version was about the same, with the only difference being what's used to point at a hapless victim.

"Yeah," Camicazi grinned. "Actually managed to freak him out when it became my turn."

"Really?" I grinned. I suspect Camicazi might have pulled off some crazy stunt like steal the former dragon's linens or steal a whole room. I wouldn't put it past her. "What did you do I wonder?"

"Oh that? I justâ€| said he didn't look half bad."

I froze. "Wait you wereâ€| seriously considering a mating proposal?" I mean, it was the first thing to roll into my mind; we were in the season for it.

Camicazi's grin burst into laughter. "No! You were just like everyone, always assuming what I said was some sort of romantic thing!" she said, much to my relief.

"Good," I replied, once I got my composure; the Bog Burglar was still laughing. The idea that Camicazi would willfully pursue anything with _him _seemed almost bizarre.

"Stillâ€| he doesn't look half bad," Camicazi murmured. "And he's got a little spunk in him."

"I suppose not," I confirmed. Just as so long she wasn't thinking of taking him for a mate.

"Say, I have question."

I raised an eyebrow, giving her a silent "What?"

"What ifâ€| you had to stay human forever?" she questioned.

I blinked; where had that question come out of? "Why do you wonder?"

"Justâ€| wondering," she said simply. "So, what if one day, you take off your amulet, you don't grow back into a Nadder?"

"I wouldâ€|" I tried to say something after that, but the words just wouldn't leave my mouth; the ideas just died, practically stillborn. What would I do if I suddenly found myself among humans for the rest of my life? What would it be like to have to never fly again? Or have to worry about certain faces of the moon? Clothing, I loved, because I thought it helped me express myself more, butâ€| the thought of having red hair instead of horns for the rest of seemed almost frightening.

"Would that also mean you had to take a human husband?" Camicazi added, making me the question seem almost unimaginable. My Kin only took mates for the Winter and for the earliest child rearing phases, after that, mates split off, dividing of the younglings. Humans valued things differently; their mating never ended. What if I had to take a human husband, one that I was by oath to never leave?

Shaking my head and realizing I would waste so much time mulling over the possibilities, I quickly came up with a very impulsive response. "Maybe, if I thought he was good lookingâ€|" I said.

Camicazi seemed to consider that for a moment, which I knew wasn't good all of the time. "How?"

"Well, he'd have to be unlike most of the other males," I said. "The big brutish types on Berk might not be my typeâ€|" They were also not Kin, but that would defeat the point of this question.

"So you maybe like Toothless?" she asked. "He's definitely different."

"No, I will not take Toothless as a mate," I said.

"Well, I was saying someone like him," Camicazi corrected, a wry grin on her face. I really should just stop getting to draw conclusions when I was around Camicazi. "But since you brought it up, how would it be if you had to take _him for a husband?"_

"I'm not doing that!" I insisted

"Why not?" she questioned.

I groaned. Did I really have to explain myself? I thought she would have seen why it was a bad idea. "He notâ€| one of us," I said. "He's different." Even back when we were young, there was a very clear difference between us and it wasn't the simple fact he a Night Fury, a rare and elusive Kin that I had only ever seen two of. In addition, Toothless aged differently, staying a child long enough for hatchlings that were born when he did to grow into adulthood and have their own young. Now that the truth was out, it was clear that he wasn't even Kin to begin with.

"True," Camicazi admitted. "But if you were never a dragon again, you would be too different eitherâ€|"

I frowned. Would I really get so desperate for a mate that I'd have to take husband like him? In fact, our apparent ages were very close, and the difference between our actual ages would decrease as we got over. If I had to stay human forever, would I begin to see him as not as bad?

No, that's not what I'd do! I'd rather be celibate if that was my choice to make. "No way!" I told Camicazi. "Can we stopâ€| talking about these things?" I shouted. I was hoping my Host would not hear of this outburst or was not silently peaking inâ€| Even worse if _he _was here.

The Bog Burglar backed away. "I suppose that's enough gossip for one dayâ€|"

"It is."

"We can do more later," she assured.

"Right..." I said. We'll obviously need to do something to spend the time while sailing toâ€| wherever it was this Alvin took refuge in.

* * *

><p>"You can still stop them you know," I told the Night Fury. "All you'd have to do is say something to your Dad." Turned dragon looked at me, his scowl darkening. He wasn't in a good mood, especially since yesterday.<p>

"I'm not going to, Astrid." Hiccup replied drearily. "If Toothless wants to go off and get himself killed, who am I to stop him? If you want to stop them, go ahead." he suggested, almost cold.

Past the cliff's edge, I could see that Camicazi's ship just about to leave the harbor. Even this far up, I could still recognize the heads of some of my friends: Camicazi stood at the center, barking orders. Toothless and Fishlegs were on oneside of the deck, waiting things out while the girls Meatlug and Stormfly were doing things like manning oars or taking orders from the Bog Burglar Captain.

The whole trip had been pitched to Stoick as a "chance to strengthen ties between Hooligans and Bog Burglars", but no one else really knew what it was for. It was a crazy idea, for the four of them to go

alone to face Alvin without any support. By all rights, I should have just told the Chief about it and had them all stranded on the island and yet, I didn't; I couldn't really. I promised Stormfly that I'd give her revenge and I couldn't stop that.

As they disappeared off in the distance, I felt my heart sink. I always hated that feeling, that sense of dread and worry in the pit of my stomach. I had no way of knowing if anyone was going to make it back and I wouldn't know for sure until they either sailed home or several months passed. "It's too late for that now..." I said to Hiccup.

"Good," said the dragon. It almost seemedâ€¦ bizarre, dreamlike, I seen him, depressed, down, usually after a big failure, but this was something else. For the first time, I saw Hiccup... like this. He was so cold with that same half-vicious, animal-like scowl and burning glare I once earned from his Mom. Weirdest of all, I think I might have been scared of him; that was not funny, not sarcastic. It was terrifying.

And all of that was being directed towards Toothless, someone who was not even there. Yesterday, they had their first big fight sinceâ€¦ ever. At first, it started about their Mom, Hiccup talking about how as her children, the two should have allowed her to visit Berk. Toothless disagreed, saying the fact that she's not exactly the most stable dragon in Midgard. Then the conversation went on to other matters, like how Hiccup was being so overprotective, about how Toothless really should start thinking about other people, which I believed were both very accurate points. Then, like any argument between two mad people, they resorted to the name calling. Through out all that, I did the smart thing and kept my mouth shut.

After that, well, things became worse. Hiccup tore off his saddle and nearly had it burned to ash. Toothless was going off on this voyage, now intent on spending as much time as possible from his brother. Really, I'm surprised Stoick isn't seeing any of this, because if he did, he'd probably be asking questions instead of saying how responsible his sons were being.

I really wanted to snap Hiccup out of it, to grab that soft spot by Hiccup's chin and send him into a daze of pleasure and warmth, but somehow, I got the impression he wouldn't appreciate it right now. Still, could I leave him like this, upset at everyone?

"You knowâ€¦" I began. "Camicazi's plan isn't all that much different from yours." No, I couldn't. I wanted to be there for him, yet at the same time, I wanted to point out just how much of a hypocrite he was beingâ€¦

The dragon narrowed his eyes at me, a low growl escaping his clenched teeth.

I steeled myself, this was still Hiccup, right? I mean, he has a hard time willfully trying to hurt anyone, let alone kill anyone. I mean, he was just having a bad day. "Look, Hiccup, I agree with with Toothless your plan was crazy." I was surprised that instead of biting me or sending me to the ground, his growl died down as a look of shame flashed briefly on his face. Of course this was still Hiccup, why was I getting so worked up over a weak growl?

He snorted, "That's what you said last time."

"I mean it, when it comes down to it, your idea to meet your Mom on the island with the King in the mountain, that's not exactly the smartest thing you ever came up with." I told him.

"Right because you know how well every other plan I came up with endedâ€¦"

"That's not what I said!" I shouted. Why did he have to be so stubborn? "Hiccup, last time we were there, you Mom nearlyâ€¦made you someone else. You would haveâ€¦ forgotten everything." Even his friends, like me.

"She still my Mom, Astrid..." said the dragon. "I couldn't just leave her."

"She attacked the Tribe and nearly killed your Dad at least a dozen times," I reminded him.

"I know," he said. "But if I can do this, maybe she won't have to anymore."

"People won't forget that she helped hundreds of Vikings getting killedâ€¦" I said. On top of other property damages.

Hiccup stayed silent and looked up at the light snowfall coming from above. He clearly didn't have a good response thought up.

"Hiccup, why do you want to help her?" I grabbed his attention by drawing closer and placing my hand over his paws.

He looked at me, almost shameful. "Astrid, I just wanted toâ€¦ fix something that was broken." Now it was my turn to become temporarily mute. "Mom and Dad, they've both been alone when they raised Toothless and me. If I could break the curse on Momâ€¦ maybe, I could finally say that for once, I really did something _good._"

I stared at the dragon, thinking how I was going to respond to that. He wanted to bring his family together, to finish its one big problem and set everything straight; I could really relate. After a brief pause, I finally realized what I needed to say to him, "You already did plenty of good things."

Hiccup looked at me, stunned as if I threw a pile of stones at his face. "Uhâ€¦ what?" was his only reaction.

Realizing I had a chance to maybe get to him, I took it. "Hiccup, you did plenty of good things," I said. He still looked at me as if I was some sort of madwoman. Maybe, I was; I've hung around Hiccup enough. "I mean, youâ€¦ organized a massive jailbreak Outcast Island."

"To save my own skinâ€¦" he said, as if selfishness somehow downgraded his actions.

"You saved your brother how many times?"

"He hates me..."

I rolled my eyes, he was just full of excuses wasn't he? "You fought

off powerful and dangerous enemies, forcing them to retreat."

"I-I'mâ€¦" Hiccup was at a loss for words.

I pressed on. "Hiccup, you're not a total failure. Most people don't do half the things you do..."

Hiccup had his head pointed at the ground; he couldn't even look at me straight in the eyes. "Most people don't end up getting their brothers hating them for accusing said brother of abandoning their mother," he said.

"Toothless will forgive you," I hoped. Hopefully being gone for a day or two did work a wonder or something.

"I still feel bad about itâ€¦and with Toothless gone, I don't know how I can work on any of the magic things."

I nodded. Apparently, one of the big rules about the sort of sorcery Hiccup and Toothless were learning was that you had to directly make things, or at least be able to write. Since Hiccup couldn't lift a hammer or use a chisel, well, that really put a damper on his work. He could only write on wood but apparently, that was a big no-no most of the time. "You can wait for him to come back."

"Maybeâ€¦" He didn't seem all too thrilled about that. Still, it was better than him being perpetually angry.

"Orâ€¦ we could go and see your Mom."

Hiccup's tail and wings involuntarily went up in a startled display. "Astrid, are you feeling okay?"

"I'm fine." I don't know why I bothered even suggesting that. Maybe I wanted him to realize something or to be fully convinced that he had my trust or maybe I just knew what it was like to want to fix something. I would have given anything to fix my old axe, to achieve greatness with it by my side, but I knew that was impossible. Maybe I wanted to give Hiccup the same chance I can't have. "Listen, if you want to go and bring your Mom back home, I'll back you up if you want. Then when Toothless comes home, it'll be a big family reunion."

Hiccup looked as though he were experiencing something horrific. I know I was, I was still feeling a little awkward. "But last time that happened, you were captured for a month!"

I smirked. I knew what I'd say to that. "Then you'll just have to break us out again."

"But what abou-"

"And before you say anything about me getting hurt, I'll just recover from it like you doâ€¦"

"But you'lllâ€¦"

"Become Kin," I said flatly. "A Nadder like Stormfly." I pointed toward my rear, a short, somewhat spiny tail stuck out from beneath.

In addition to my massive scaled feet, they were the most annoying things in the world because my body and my clothes didn't compliment them in the least; now I know what it's like to be Hiccup, always knocking things over. Stormfly is actually quite aggressive in a scrap, much better than some people I knew. Still, I find it somewhat odd that I see that my change is more annoying than anything else. It doesn't scare me, not in the least. Then again, there weren't questions raised over the 'humanity' of anyone who was becoming a dragon.

Hiccup looked at me, still skeptical. "So you'll really join me?"

"Yup," I said. It'll also be a good thing to finally be able to talk to more than just a few of my friends again; I hated not being able to speak Norse. No one understood me at all, now I understood the world Hiccup and the twins lived in. "We'll have to figure out when we want to go."

"We can't tell Dad or anyone else where, but maybe we can just spend the day over there and come home during the night." said Hiccup.

I nodded. It seemed reasonable, but at the time same time, I felt uneasy. Maybe it was the thought that if I didn't make it home for dinner, my parents might think I went missing; or worse, on a date. I mean, I like Hiccup and all, but, I mean my parents kind of blame him for the fact I was starting to change, which is sorta true. I didn't blame him for it though, I didn't feel changing into a Nadder was all that that bad, really. A part of me just can't wait to get it all done and over with, just so I could see myself. Wait, what was I thinking about again? Oh, right, Hiccup's Quest. "You'll have to fly me then."

Hiccup face contorted into a smile sans teeth. "Well, you can wear Toothless's outfit and we can make it there in record time. Good thing most of my outfit survived my hearth."

"Stormfly and I both agreed it looked tacky," I told him. That did nothing to wipe off the big grin on his face.

Just for that, I decided to give Hiccup a little something.

A smile dawned on my face, distracting the Night Fury for a few vital seconds. He always seemed to pause a little every time I gave him a big grin. I knew just how I wanted to take advantage of that. I approached the dragon and gently reached down to his chin and...

Hiccup pulled away at the last moment and took a step back into a heaping pile of snow. "Astrid!"

"Oh, so you're learning!" I declared, my grin becoming more manic. "Come here!"

I lunged forward and the dragon, but he kept evading. "Astrid, now's not the time for that!"

"Sure it is," I contested. "Now stand still!" Maybe, I'm being a little over enthusiastic about trying to hit that spot on Hiccup's body that'd send him to a relaxed daze, but I didn't mind.

Besides, Hiccup was a friend, a good friend who stood by me through thick and thin. I just decided that in addition to helping him out with his problems, I'd solve the issue of his really bad morning by forcing him to relax the rest of the day.

Being friends with him just meant I could get away with it.

* * *

><p>This chapter is me setting up everything, to depict everyone making the decision to go out. Now that it's all setup, let me inform you both that this story arc is actually two-in-one.

****What could possibly go wrong?****

****I will admit that I wish I realized I put more Hiccup-Astrid interactions in to last story. I'm remedying this now.****

****As for Toothless, we've got an interesting dynamic with Stormfly and Camicazi brewing. Even outside of shipping, it's quite fascinating.****

14. Chapter 14

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****This chapter is slightly later in the day than I normally would have delivered it, but I did manage to post it during the midday.****

****Anyways, read and hope to hear from you soon.****

* * *

><p>Never in my whole life had I have ever felt this odd mix of emotion. Before today, I never knew I could get so angry at anyone, let alone my own little brother. I mean, how could I not? He was deliberately refusing to help our own mother, that's not something I could easily let go.<p>

Astrid's little talk cooled me down, enough that I wasn't constantly thinking insults to throw at him when he go back. She was right, maybe I went a little overboard when I started throwing insults around. I mean, I did call Toothless a 'cripple' but he started it!

Then, Astrid gave me a fang toothed grin, sending me chills down my spine, as if she knew what I was thinking about at just the right time.

I returned one of my own, pretending I was not thinking of the best way to strangle my brother the moment he returned on Camicazi's ship.

Apparently satisfied, the young shield maiden went away, leading me forward.

If I had to describe was feeling, it was like I had swallowed burning coals. The fire was still raging in me, but it was subdued and dying. I was still so angry, yet I was so aware of how wrong it was to be mad. I want to let go, yet I still can't; not with the image of Toothless's words to me still stuck in my head.

Which is why I'm going to smother it the only way I knew how, by keeping busy. I still had a mission and with or withoutâ€¦ someone I shouldn't be even thinking about.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Astrid said as she lead me through trees. We were already far out of Berk, and getting farther still.

"I am."

"I mean, you do know he'sâ€¦ changed, right?"

I nodded. "So I heard."

"Okay, just don't-"

"Yah!" I heard a shrill, high pitched voice cry out nearby. I didn't have time to register if it was in Norse or dragon, but then again, it was just a shout, a warcry. Then, A gout of flame erupted out of nowhere, causing me to reflexively duck. A tree branch from just above me fell off its trunk in a burning heap.

Astrid gave me a look of disappointment. "I know, I know." I mean, I was fire proof and I didn't need to worry about burning, yet sometimes, I was scared of fire. Toothless would beâ€¦ no, no not right now.

"Ata boy!" I heard a different voice declare in excitement. This one in dragon.

"But, sire, I really advise against thatâ€¦" a third voice, Hookfang, spoke with great exhaustion. He was speaking in his native tongue.

Approaching the assorted voices, Astrid and I quietly made our way forward.

Before us stood a trio of Monstrous Nightmares, in assorted various sizes. And they saw us, in turn.

I easily recognized Hookfang by his utterly massive size and his reddish orange coat. He looked at us with a pleading look, as if he was at his wits end and barely keeping it together.

The next Nightmare was not at all monstrous. In Fact, he was both smaller and far younger than the other two. Gustav with his lighter, practically orange coat flicked his tail happily and kept spewing gouts of flame in random directions, showing off. I heard he had gotten a little close to the fighting when Alvin unleashed his curse. But it seemed the former boy was having the time of his life.

The third was a Nightmare I had never seen before. His scales were a much darker red, practically a crimson color so deep that I had a

hard time seeing the dark spots on his seemed very happy to see us. "Astrid!" said the unidentified dragon.

Or more rather, Astrid. "Uhâ€| hey Snotlout." I blinked when I heard that. This was Snotlout? I mean, I know that he changed, but seeing him was just something I couldn't prepare for.

"Have you come to see me?" the new said excitedly.

"Kinda," Astrid said. "How have you been since-"

"Oh, umâ€|" Snotlout quickly interrupted, as if he didn't want that statement to be finished. I mean, my cousin sometimes, did that for me, but I knew something was up if he was interrupting _Astrid _of all people. "Uh...I'm just peachy camping out here in the wilderness!"

"I don't think camp should be in walking distance of-" I tried to inform him, but I was cut off.

"Pft!" grunted the new Nightmare. "It's still camping!" I mean, this was at best, maybe a ten, twenty, minute walk away from the nearest building. That's not really all that far.

"I know you're the one who's been stealing from the granary every day." I said, referencing some of the daily reports my Dad would often groan about every dinner. Technically it was a nonissue since as a dragon, Snotlout was allotted daily provisions. It's justâ€| that apparently he went out of his way to steal the food instead of doing something like ask someone to hand it to him...

"So? That'sâ€| foraging." I know I might not be the best wilderness survival expert, but even I knew that was wrong, way wrong.

I just shook my head in dissatisfied embarrassment. "Anyways, we were wondering if you guys would like to join us for a trip we'll be going to from now until the end of Winter."

"Where?" my cousin replied.

"The Nest."

Snotlout gave me a confused look. "What?"

Hookfang explained, though I imagine he wasn't exactly feeling so proud about it. "It is our home, my liege. Where our other Kin are..."

Gustav spoke up. "That'd be cool! We could meet... our other Kin, real ones." How Gustav knew was that was beyond me. "like Hey, we should go there!"

Hookfang's discomfort was easy enough for me to see. He clearly had issues with going back home. "Thatâ€| might not be wise, young Nightmare..."

"Yeah, we should go! The young Nightmare was right. is right!" agreed my cousin.

"Young Nightmare?" Astrid and I both questioned.

Snotlout did an impression that might have passed for a shrug. "Well, we can't say his old name! So until we come up with a new one, he wanted to not have one!" It was one of the weird things about the dragon language. Names of people didn't always carry over, especially since dragons couldn't make the necessary sounds. For instance, my name of 'Hiccup' was easy enough, almost exactly the same thing, as was "Snotlout". Astrid's name directly translated to 'beautiful', so whenever I wanted to say her name, I used the word 'beautiful', though she did always blush just a bit whenever I did.

"Yeah! Yeah! I hope it's much cooler than my old one!" Gustav confirmed. Unfortunately, he had the misfortune of having a name that did not have a direct translation in Dragonese. His name if broken down meant 'Staff of the Goths'; when any of us dragons tried to speak it, it came out as 'really long walking stick used by some far off people'. It's pretty understandable, why he didn't want us calling him that.

I don't know why, but hearing him say that made me shudder. It reminded me of just how close I was to just I was to not being myself anymore. I could just have stopped being 'Hiccup' and adopted some more dragon appropriate name like Firewing or Terrible Breath or something. I mean, it might have just been bad memories doing the talking, but the idea of just discarding your own name like that sent shivers down my spine. Worst part was what if that still could happen?

I shook my head, forcing on way less distracting matters. "Astrid, we really can't take him," I said.

Astrid noddingly agreed.

"Aw, but why not?" Gustav and Snotlout both protested.

"You have to go back to you parents!" Astrid told Gustav. "I mean, sure I got you transferred to learn under Snotlout and Hookfang, but that doesn't mean following them everywhere."

"Aw, but Mom said, I could!" complained the little Nightmare. Well, relatively little. He was just a bit under Astrid's size, making it somewhat easy to forget he was much younger than he looked.

"Go home now," Astrid said in a voice of firm command. The little dragon then dejectedly walked away.

"Eh, don't worry kid!" shouted Snotlout to the younger Nightmare. "Come by later tonight!"

Those words seemed to perk up the younger Nightmare's soured mood and he ran away with a more upbeat pace.

Hookfang gave a relieved sigh when we could no longer see him. "Oh perfect."

"So anyways," Astrid began. "You coming with us...or not?"

"I have a better idea how about we go alone?" Snotlout said, in a somewhat revised version of that flirty tone he pulled whenever he wanted to try getting Astrid's affection. It was really bizarre. A

part of me almost felt it was exactly the same as before, back when we were all human, but with a few growling, or animalistic noises mixed in. Yet at the same time, I could tell it wasn't, like he strangely had this animalistic pressure to him.

I glanced at Hookfang, wondering if he might have had something to do with that. "Don't look at me; I had nothing to do with it!"

My cousin's tone was so strange, so unfamiliar, I almost forgot to comprehend what he actually said. Fortunately, Astrid had her own reply. "How about no?"

And one lump on the forehead later, "... Uh, sure, let's go with everyone!" replied Snotlout. "Glad I thought of it!"

And now came for the hard part. "Say, Hookfang, would you like to come?"

Hookfang seemed a little uneasy when I said that. "But I still have to do classes for the trainees."

I don't know why Hookfang was so nervous, but I couldn't help but feel he was just coming up with excuses. "Well, they're doing fine now that you helped them through the first and hardest parts." I said. "Dad won't mind if you were like Stormfly and Meatlug and took a few days off if there's no need."

"Yeah! You should come, too, Hookfang!" agreed my father that Snotlout had accepted, I had more leverage to put on Hookfang. Not that I didn't want Snotlout to come, I mean, he was probably good to have if things went really bad in the King's Domain.

Hookfang shook his head. "But my liege, I don't think I should."

"You should come along!" insisted Snotlout. If he was upset, he was too elated to show it.

"Snotlout! I can't go back!" Hookfang shouted. That stunned us for a moment. He said once he had all of our attention.

We stood there, for a solid minute silent, until we broke free one at a time.

"Uh, Hookfang," said Snotlout in a concerned tone.

The Nightmare backed away. "I... Just... I'm... Sorry... I-Maybe..." stuttered the larger dragon. And then as soon as it happened, that outburst disappeared.

Assert himself and use Snotlout's actual name was different, something I wasn't used to seeing. "Okay, then. Well, you don't have to come," I said. Even though the whole reason we're here was because I felt we needed a native guide. Hookfang was the only one left on the island I felt could help us navigate the King's domain safely. While, I did have some idea of where to go, I doubted it was anything of a complete map.

"Well... maybe, I should come," the dragon said.

"Yeahâ€¦ you should..." agreed Snotlout. He sounded more wary, as if afraid the larger Nightmare might suddenly attack him.

"Alright, Snotlout, I'm coming..." groaned Hookfang, I couldn't tell if he sounded depressed about his outburst or because he was being forced to come as long as I knew him, Hookfang had always seemed to be a very passive yesman. To see himâ€¦ assert himself or even use Snotlout's name like that seemed almost more unbelievable than the fact that we were all dragons...

"Rightâ€¦" Astrid said. "We'll see you both after lunch."

"Uhâ€¦ right," agreed Snotlout.

And then, Astrid and I left, taking to the skies. She didn't have the safety harness I made for Toothless, but that didn't as much matter for these short distances.

"Okay, now that we got our guide taken care of, what next on our agenda?"

"Just, one last thing," I said. "We're going to have to say some goodbyes." Of course, we were going to come back to Berk every day before supper, but there was one person who was going to be leaving before I returned tonight.

I landed us on the docks and I found myself greeted by people I wasn't expecting.

"Uh, hey guys!" I said to them, trying to sound as cheery as possible.

Four sets of eyes, four of them dragon, four of them human looked at me with distaste. The twins and their friend the Zippleback, Barf and Belch seemed upset at me.

"You invited Snotlout?" Tuffnut complained.

"And not us?" said Ruffnut.

I gave a very big sheepish grin. I turned to Astrid for help, but she just gave me that 'I don't know what you're talking about or who you are' face. "Uhâ€¦" I tried to say something, but I came up a blank.

"You are undertaking a dangerous Quest," said Barf.

"And you leave us behind!" said Belch.

"It's not that I don't want you to come along!" I tried to say. Then I forgot, that the twins couldn't understand meâ€¦ well, they couldn't before either, so I guess that's not much different. Still, I tried to say words to Barf and Belch, maybe they could use whatever strange method they used to have the twins understand them. "Listen, it's justâ€¦"

"We've decided to tell you," Ruffnut interrupted.

"That we're not going to speak to you, Tuffnut added.

"Butâ€¦"

"We're not talking to you!" said Tuffnut. "Whatever you're saying..."

Barf then said, in the dragon language, "He's just confused."

Tuffnut then nodded his head in understanding. "Ah, well, we're still not saying a word to you."

"But you keep talking to him, genius!" Ruffnut pointed out.

"I know I am but what am I?"

"That doesn't make any sense."

That's because you're not a genius!"

At this point, I found myself becoming a little wiser by just walking around my four friends; Astrid was way smarter than me and made her way to our destination while I was distracted.

By the time, I boarded Trader Johann's ship, I found Astrid writing words out with charcoal tipped pen on some parchment, using the paper to communicate since she couldn't speak Norse anymore.

Trader Johann looked at pages, reading them. "Well, that'll depend on how long it takesâ€¦"

Both of them had their backs turned and neither of them know I was coming. Strange how that sometimes, despite the fact I was way bigger than most anybody, I was quite stealthy when I wanted to be. As I got closer, I could Astrid wrote the words, 'HE SHOULD BE HERE ANY MINUTE NOW.'

After reading that, I felt like now was a good time to introduce my presence. I slammed my tail into the ground repeatedly, making a very audible thumping noise that drew their attention to me.

"Hm, what took you so long?" said Astrid, a smile of feigned innocence plastered onto her face.

Tradr Johann's motives were a little more pure. I didn't blame him for being cautious around the twins and their Zippleback. "Hey, Hiccup! How's my favoriteâ€¦" He tried to say, but merchant was at a loss for words. "...dragon," he said in an awkward tone, as if he was suddenly just realizing it. Well, to be fair, last time I actually had a word with him, I wasn't larger than that bronze statue of some large yak he had on display.

"I'm fine; it's not all bad..." I said. Astrid wrote that down for me, allowing Trader Johann to read it. Again, I really wish I had that collar Toothless and I wanted to make working so I could directly talk to someone whenever I wanted to.

"Well, if you say so," said the merchant. Gave me another look and frowned. "Still, I can't help but feelâ€¦ responsible." He said in a hushed tone. Even though the ship was empty right now, aside from the

three of us, mostly since Trader Johann ran a sale lasting well into the night yesterday, I figure he didn't want to make himself a big target by announcing he was the reason the whole dragon/human barrier seemed so flimsy right now.

"It wasn't your fault," I had Astrid write down. "I'm the one who decided to go try out some crazy spells I learned."

"Well, I do kind of owe you though," said the merchant.

"You don't!" I insisted. "I mean, the deal was I'd tell you what I learnedâ€¦ well, I learned not to be more careful of where I learn things from."

Astrid made a face at me. "Just take it!"

I sighed. "Fine."

Trader Johann seemed relieved. "Well, if you need anything that I can give, you can have itâ€¦ Not that I know what I can give a dragon, mind, but..." Then some idea must have lit up in the merchant's mind. "Say, you wouldn't happen to know where this little brother of yours I keep hearing about is? I've been wanting to meet him."

'HE'S AWAY," Astrid wrote of her own accord.

I didn't say anything. I was doing all this busy work to keep myself from thinking about Toothless, now he's come up again and now I just didn't know what to think.

My blood didn't feel like it was burning hot with rage, my heart wasn't thumping out hatred with every beat. The fire inside me had been smothered in its entirety, leaving nothing behind but ashes and guilt. I mean, what kind of brother was I? Letting him go off to get himself killed without going there to protect him?

"Uhâ€¦ Hiccup?" I heard Trader Johann call to me. I was snapped back to reality, realizing I was still at merchant's cargo ship. "Well, I was just thinking, maybe if you want I could offer to give your brother anything in my store...but if he's not hereâ€¦ well maybe I'll find him when I make my rounds to the other islands," he explained, as if nothing had happened.

Inside, I felt like I was being offered a chance to redeem myself, a chance to at least set something right in a minor way, even if it was a crazy and nigh impossible way. What were the chances Toothless would run into Trader Johann in the Barbaric Archipelago sometime before Winter ended? Those odds were pretty lowâ€¦ and I was used to that. So, I took them. "Go ahead," I told the merchant. Maybe with a little luck, Toothless will find some use for Trader Johann's favor that I couldn't.

The merchant nodded, accepting. Turning out to sea, I could tell that Trader Johann was oddly fascinated by the working dragons and men laboring to break the ice from the harbor. "It's amazing, isn't it?" Trader Johann said. "Never in all my years have I ever seen such a thing."

"Yeah," I agreed. "Just something Iâ€¦ " Now that I thought about, I didn't know where I got the idea from. It just sort of popped into my

head. Everyone one had a role to play, that was vitally important no matter who or what they were, higher or lower. If enough people didn't do their jobs, the whole thing fell apart.

Ronald the Thundredrum made a pass by the merchant vessel and prepared the ice so that it can be sliced into chunks by the jet of hot water the scaldron would blast it with. Pretty soon, Johann's vessel would be set free.

"Well, I'll be sailing South," said the merchant. "Making my way down to where it gets warmer before the whole ocean decides to freeze on me."

I nodded. Sailing alone in the Winter was pretty dangerous, especially with the cold weather freezing things or occasionally sending volleys of hail. There was also the fact Trader Johann would have to ration out his firewood to last him until he made his next landfall. Still, the aging traveler has sailed the frigid Winter seas numerous times before on his own, what was another one?

Now, I just wished Toothless was here, not running on some adventure on some dangerous probably exotic place. And it wasn't just because I didn't want him facing certain doom. Now, I owed it to him, as an older sibling to set the standard, to be a good influence. I hoped that Odin, Thor, Ægi, Kári, Freya, Freyr, whoever, it almost didn't matter; I was just hoping that if there was anyone of the gods that favored me, they'd make sure Toothless met Trader Johann and got whatever he wanted from the wayward merchant.

Shoving those thoughts out of my mind, one last time, I instead thought of an island with a tall mountain. I still had a goal in mind and maybe if Toothless never meets Trader Johann, I could at least let him meet someone else.

* * *

><p>What if Mother did come home? I wish I could stop thinking about it, but the idea was constantly in my thoughts. I kept imagining how it'd all play out, none of it good. I imagine she would show on Berk, a Night Fury wrapped up in all of her horrific glory, and start terrorizing the kids, maybe setting fire to our house, or maybe breaking Father's heart; she wasn't human. It was so frightening to know just how it'd all play out.<p>

And my brother would be the cause of all of it! How could he be so blind? He never seen how vicious she could get when she was in a bad mood, how strict and how unforgiving she could be for failure. I'd sooner forgive Stormfly for a lifetime's all of her humiliation or give amnesty to the Whispering Death for a lifetime's night terrors before I would let Mother step another paw on Berk.

I stared out at the ocean, my anger became stifled at the thought that I could prevent it from happening. Now that I wasn't there, there was nothing to stop my brother from enacting his foolish plan. I should have just stayed behind, maybe just a little bit longer to talk some sense into Hiccup. Or if anything, told on Dad or something. Maybe if I told Camicazi, I could have this ship turned right around and return home in no time.

Then I turned a glance at Stormfly, sitting crosslegged by the ship's

main mast. She was spending her time polishing her sword, making sure it was spotless.

No, I had to go on this voyage. Stormfly was right about me, after all. I was weak, not all that special; I only got as far as I did in the Knighthood because of what I was born as, not being I had any skill or merit of my own. All I ever did to her was get her stuck in prison. More than anything, she _deserved _the chance to face Alvin.

She kept polishing her blade, unaware I was looking at her. Now that I thought about it, with the sun directly on her, I can't help but notice just how bright, how vibrant her hair was, like I was looking at a warm bonfire. Her teeth were smooth her skin was-

Stormfly turned and looked at me. I quickly jerked my head away, pretending I was watching the sea rolling by. Hopefully she never knew realized I was spending so much time staring at her. Just what I was I thinking? Looking at a girl like her was just asking for trouble, it didn't matter whyâ€¦| Though, I couldn't really explain why I did it.

Keeping her in my peripheral vision, I saw her express what must have been a look of confusion before turning back to her shining bladeâ€¦| It somehow didn't seem to glow as much as-

I immediately bolted before she would decide to run that sword through me on the off chance she felt like it. I made my way over to the hatch that led to the hold, thinking that maybe I could be alone down there. I would have climbed down if I wasn't stopped by a voice calling out to me.

"Hey, where are you going?" Stormfly question me, not taking her eyes off weapon.

"Uhâ€¦| you wouldn't care to knowâ€¦|"

"Perhaps," agreed the girl. "Still, I am curious as to why you're going..."

"Why do you wish to know that?" I didn't feel comfortable being in the girl's attention, usually it was a setup for something far more malicious or cruel.

"You've been sitting there for several hours," Stormfly said offhandedly. "I simply wanted to know why you suddenly decide to leave now."

I blinked, not really realizing how long it had been. Now that I thought about it, she was right. I think my back had a cramp, a sort of soreness that came from sitting at such an odd angle.

Worse, I realized now that even if I wanted to, I'd be forcing Camicazi to waste extra time sending me back. Maybe if this heist didn't take too long, I could stop my brother's crazy plot before he did anything major.

"I think I've had enough of the sea for now," I told Stormfly. The Nadder simply shrugged, not even bothering to turn her head from her blade.

Figuring that I lost her interest in me, I delved down into the ship's cargo hold unimpeded. The hold was mostly empty with at best a few barrels of food, likely to keep the ship as light as possible. There were a few lit lanterns around.

Upon entering, I realized I wasn't alone. Now, I know that as a fully staffed Viking ship, Camicazi's vessel would have had several sailors, her servants, manning every part of it. The thing was, the cargo hold was simply just that, a place to store cargo. There were very few, if any, positions that required someone to man, well, I suppose, in this case woman, the cargo hold.

Well, I didn't find any of Camicazi's handmaidens.

Instead, I found my friends, Fishlegs and Meatlug. More specifically, Meatlug was in human form, her back against one of the walls of the hold. On the other side, was Fishlegâ€¦ doing something I found so horrible that I could practically feel myself dying on the inside.

It was something that made me feel worse than flying, sailing, or cold weather ever did. Now, while I had gotten used to each of those things after spending enough time, what I saw down there in the hold, I knew I would never get over.

Meatlug had this big grin on her face and enjoying it for a reason I could _never _really understandâ€¦ I would have thought of all dragons, she would have been the one to take offense and put a stop to thisâ€¦ horror.

Fishlegs was clearly enjoying it, completely oblivious to what suffering he was inflicting on me. How anyone on the main deck didn't notice what was happening beneath their feet, I would never notice. When he was done, the large boy looked satisfied, as if he had won some great distinction.

Meatlug burst into a roar of applause, the only one in the room who was actively cheering.

"You're so sweet," commented the Gronckle in disguise.

"NO!" I protested. "Don't do that again!" I begged.

"Why?" questioned the Gronckle. "It's only singing!"

"That's not singing!" I countered. I saw Fishlegs take a step away, the smile of satisfaction evaporating from his face. I quickly realized I needed to change gears, not if I didn't want a certain Gronckle to be upset at me. "...Sorry," I quickly said. "You just need more practiceâ€¦"

"Wellâ€¦ I was off key," admitted Fishlegs. "I do need more workâ€¦"

"You were fineâ€¦ for a novice," said Meatlug.

Fishlegs grin of satisfaction returned then. "Well, maybe you can help me out with that."

"I would love to," Meatlug replied. Thankfully it looked like I quashed her anger before it could boil to the surface. She had something far more important, more meaningful to think about.

I decided I wanted to quietly step away before Fishlegs would start singing again. I didn't precisely dislike either of him, but sometimes, I just don't want to have my ears would bleed on meâ€¦ though I wouldn't be opposed to Meatlug's singing in her actual voice.

But before I could leave the duo, I felt someone's big meaty hand grab onto mine. Turning around, I found Fishlegs's massive palm engulfing my palm. "Hey, wait, Toothless, I've beenâ€¦" he kept stuttering.

"What is it Fishlegs?"

"Well, you seeâ€¦ Uh..." he still kept stuttering.

I glowered. I wanted to say for him to spit it out.

Meatlug sighed. "Fishlegs has been thinking," she said.

"Right!" the boy's confirmed.

"Thinking what?"

"Wellâ€¦ don't you think it's odd for Camicazi to want Hiccup around I mean?" explained the blonde boy.

I shook my head. "No," I said flatly, trying to suppress my emotions upon hearing his name.

"On a stealth mission?" Fishlegs pointed out. I frowned, not really seeing what he's getting at. "Night Furies are many thing, butâ€¦ not all that good at sneaking around tight corners."

"He can fly and remain unseen in the night," I replied.

"That's handy, but there's no guarantee it work or even be useful. Alvin could be in an underground shelter for all we know."

"My brother is alsoâ€¦ cunning." Or crazy, depending on his mood. "He could also have brought his Breath to bear upon Alvin's forces if we needed it."

"Maybe," said Fishlegs. "But then why does she want _any of us_?"

"Because we'reâ€¦" I wanted to say 'friends', but then I remembered we're not exactly an elite force of noble warriors. It's one thing to ask your friends to fight by your side, it's another thing to ask them to walk into danger. Then againâ€¦ this was Camicazi; she'd consider that the right thing to do.

"Camicazi is Heir to the throne of the Bog Burglars," reminded Fishlegs. "She's got probably a hundred warriors at her beck and call, and that's before you remember her personal hand maidens!"

I tried to think of some other justification, but I just couldn't

really think of any really good reason. Why were we here?

"And then there's this whole plan itself," added Meatlug. "She hasn't exactly explained why she wanted _us _to come along to _fight Alvin._"

"We're going to steal from him," I corrected.

"You know what I mean," complained Meatlug. "He's near unbeatable and she's asking us to go into his lair. Unless we're pre"

"I'm sure she has her reasons." I said. But now I saw what was bothering them. It seemedâ€¦ almost counter intuitive to bring us along, even more so Fishlegs and Meatlug; they were many things, stealthy was not one of them.

"She mightâ€¦" Fishlegs replied. "We might just be worrying about it too muchâ€¦"

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, I could check it out," I said. Maybe it'd also settle my own discomfort.

With a nod of my head, I left the hold and climb back onto the top deck.

Stormfly was where I left her. Now that she was done polishing her sword, she started tending to herself, using a bronze hand mirror to see her own reflection. I quietly avoided her gaze, though a part of me just wanted to keep watching.

The dozen or so warrior women that crewed the ship were still busying themselves, making the sure the ship was heading the right course. Maybe one day, Father could show me how to sail a ship...like how, no, not thinking of her.

Camicazi was easy to find. She was by the ship's mast, barking orders to her crew from the center of the action.. I moved past Camicazi's 'handmaidens' and made my way to the Bog Burglar Heir.

Camicazi didn't see me as approached from her, since having a conversation with a young lady who sat ontop of the mast, one of her few handmaidens who actually looked like a maiden. "We better be there before nightfall! I want enough time to scout the defens-" Camicazi shouted.

But as I felt my business with her was more important, I interrupted the conversation between the Bog Burglar Heir and her subject.

"Camicazi!" I shouted.

Before I knew what happened, I found myself on to ground, a painful feeling in my chest and blade in my face. Camicazi was ontop of me, her face red with anger and twisted into a snarl. "Stay back you rotten, two bit..." Then her anger went away, replaced by unease. "Eh, sorry Toothless." She sheathed her blade and got off of me.

"Uhâ€¦ thank you for not killing me," I said.

"Sorry, I'm just a little jump."

"Little?" I said. It made sense, we were going to Alvin's wherever he was. It was pretty much a given that she'd be on edge. At least, it might have made sense for anyone else; Camicazi always seemed to be constantly cheery.

"A lot," she admitted with a frown. "So much is riding on this mission."

"I figured as much," I said. "Same with Fishlegs and Meatlug." And myself, but she didn't need to know that, especially not with Stormfly within earthshot.

"Really?" Camicazi muttered in a somewhat cheerier tone.

"Yeah," I told her. "They're wondering why you brought them along." Among other things.

"Well, every big heist needs some muscle every now and again," Camicazi stated as a matter of fact.

I hummed, thinking about it. That did make sense, at least in my mind. Extra strength seemed handy to have, especially if one needed to do something like break down a door. Yet, that didn't explain why we needed Fishlegs. "But why them though?" Or me at all? Stormfly was pretty much the only one here who actually made sense to bring. "Don't you have like, a couple dozen warriors who'd

"I do," Camicazi admitted. "But, it's not the same, now is it?"

"It's not?" I didn't break my gaze away from Camicazi, but I could practically feel the gazes of her crew upon me. They didn't like me questioning their heir.

"It's not," Camicazi confirmed. "I needed you all to come."

"You did?"

"Especially you."

I wanted to say something, but my body suddenly felt limp, like I was a loaf of soggy bread. I didn't know what to say, I didn't know what to think. This was someone who didn't just want me; she needed me.

"You needed him?" I heard Stormfly say, almost as stunned as I was.

Camicazi just smirked and gave an off balance shrug. "Yeah, he'll be a big asset when we finally make our attempt."

"When is that?" was the only thing I could manage to spit out. I was still too awestruck to think of anything else, but the most automatic of replies.

Camicazi then turned to the girl on top of the mast. She held her spyglass, searching for near invisible landmarks in an endless, featureless ocean. "An hour or so before we reach the island," she

said. I knew my way around based on the stars, but how anyone was able to just look at an empty expanse and tell where they were was beyond me. Still, it justâ€¦ felt right.

"Great!" Camicazi cheer. "We'll be beginning our heist on Alvin's camp tonight!"

* * *

><p>Let's play a game. Can anyone predict what I'm going to pull out seemingly from out of nowhere, only for you guys to realize the things I've hinted in the past.

I mean, there's a ton of threads that you guys never got confirmation on from Becoming the Enemy, several of which are still running. Tell me, what do you guys imagine I'm going to bring up next, I'm kinda interested.

Also, don't you guys think it's somewhat appropriate that the chapters during Dragon Mating Season will be bringing out so much shipping related materials and fuels? Normally, I wouldn't do this, but then again, this seemed like it was just the right time for it.

15. Chapter 15

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Let me just warn you right here, right now, we're about to embark on an emotional rollercoaster. Hope you guys tell me about your thoughts on this chapter and the next.

**Anyways, enjoy. **

* * *

><p>A part of me just really wanted to cut loose, to go as fast as my wings could take me. Another part of me warned me that I had Astrid riding atop my back. At the same time, yet another part of me told me that Astrid was wearing that protective flight suit keeping her attached to my upper back and she probably wouldn't forgive me if I ever told her I didn't think she could handle the the crazy stunts I did withâ€¦ someone who I really should stop being mad at.<p>

But reason won out in the end when I reminded myself that I didn't even know where I needed to go. Now, I even though knew how to reach Helheim's gate, that still didn't help me find my way to the island itself. The King's Nest might have been a volcano, it was still a single island in a really vast ocean. So to save time, I had Hookfang leading the way.

The Nightmare was in front of me, leading the way forward, flew right beside the other Nightmare, apparently getting the whole flying thing a little faster than I did, but still looked very clumsy at it.

Astrid was right on top of me, hold on tightly. "So, how far do we have to go?" she asked.

"Yeah, this is getting boring!" Snotlout commented. "Where is it?"

"Not far, my leige," said Hookfang, almost regretting this task.

"Hey, it's better than how our parents would have done it!" I told them. Ever I've spent some time traveling all over the place, the world didn't seem to be that big of a place, especially after learning how to fly. A fleet of Viking longships might have taken several hours to reach Helheim's Gate, sometimes the journey lasted from the sunrise to sunset. And that's not factoring the time being spent trying to find a single island that's been veiled by perpetual fog, covered to the brim in sea stacks and shallow reefs, and tough Honor Guard trained in exploiting the dangerous terrain.

For those of us who had the bene? We were only maybe less than half an hour in and we were already above Helheim's Gate. We completely avoided the fog and sea stacks altogether, not even needing to worry about running aground because of poor visibility or getting lost or stranded. To be honest, I almost felt like we were cheating; though if my life was some sort of Cosmic game, which honestly would explain more about me than it should, I'm pretty sure new rules were being invented on the fly every five minutes.

Hookfang then veered a sharp right and I followed. Then when we came upon a trio of ships that somehow managed to get themselves stuck on the very top of some sea stacks, Hookfang made a sharp turn left and started flying back the way we came. I still followed And that only the beginning. I think once or twice, we exited Helheim's Gate only to reenter it from the same spot.

Astrid was the one to voice her concerns. "Hey, are we lost? We kinda passed that same wrecked ship three times, already."

"Noâ€|" Hookfang said with surprised confusion, as if he didn't understand what was wrong. "This is the route I learned to take."

"Isn't it just simplier to go in a straight line?" I asked. We were making all sorts of twists and turns that just seemed unnecessary to do or made us cover the same area twice, inexplicably. Why couldn't we just travel in a straight line in a straight line?

"Yeah, To-," Astrid caught herself before saying his name outloud.

"You can say his name, Astrid," I said, almost dull. I really need to get over my issues with Toothless one way or another.

"Well, aren't you a tough guy," Astrid muttered. Hopefully Snotlout wasn't jealous. "Anyways, Toothless had his own way and that one seemed to be a little more straight forward. We only had to avoid debris or sea stacks; we never had toâ€| backtrack so much."
"

"That's odd, how did he manage to find the get the red painted ship carcass without going to find the one the Bones of Scarfring three times?" said the Nightmare, giving out directions that made no sense

to me. Still, I kept following him, since was our best bet.

"Wait, what?" was the only thing Astrid and I could say.

Hookfang shook his head, clearly not understanding us anymore than we did for him. "I still don't see what the problem is," he said.

Then, Hookfang veered another left, turning himself around again for possibly the fiftieth time.

When I turned to join him, I was expecting to see what I had seen previously throughout the whole of Helheim's Gate: an endless blanket of fog dotted by stone pillars. What I didn't expect was a large mountain, a volcanic island that somehow managed to be completely free of any and all fog, the King's Nest.

"Butâ€¦ how?" If my jaw was long enough, I think it could have reached the bottom of the oceanâ€¦ while I was still flying! We passed by that area not only seconds ago and there was nothing there. The mountain itself was so tall that it should have been perfectly visible maybe a mile away since we flew over the fog back. Yet somehow, the Nest was right directly behind us, yet never saw it until Hookfang gave us an incredibly nonsensical directions.

"We're here," confirmed Hookfang, not even bothering to explain himself. I guess that was fine, Astrid and I were still reeling, our minds trying to grasp why just happened. "Sweet! Now we can stop flying, my arms are getting tired!" said Snotlout. He didn't seem to be phased at all, not even wondering how a mountain just appeared out of nowhere

"Wings, my liege."

"Whatever!" Then, in a softer tone, Snotlout asked. "Hey, what're they doing down there?"

Below, I could see a sandy snow frosted beach, surrounded by dragons. What must have been over a hundred dragon were gathered there, all into big groups depending on their 'Breed' was. "Oh that, my liege?" said Hookfang. "Those are simply the mating ritesâ€¦. usually they are done elsewhere, but-"

Before he could explain further, Snotlout interrupted him and wondered aloud, "Mating rites huh? Oh, they gotta tell me how they pick up chicks!" Then, he flew just ahead of me, enough for me to catch the toothy grin on his faceâ€¦ I knew it was being directed at Astrid though. Then the Nightmare descended downward toward a group of a dozen Nightmares gathering for what looked like a big wrestling competition.

"Snotlout! Our Lord is not that way!" shouted Hookfang. But the other Nightmare didn't listen. Hookfang looked at me pleadingly, wondering what he should do.

"You can go ahead and keep Snotloutâ€¦ preoccupied." I told him. "We'll just meet up later on."

Nodding, Hookfang descended after Snotlout, leaving me alone with Astrid.

"Great, now that Snotlout's tried every other he knows, he's going to try to learn things from Nightmares to try woo me over," Astrid moaned.

I couldn't help but grin at that. I guess even Snotlout can't get over Astrid, either, not even when it was becoming clear to both of us we're all going to be ending up different types of dragons than her. Still, the idea that Snotlout would set up a wrestling competition to woo over Astrid seemed kinda hilarious since he'd be the only one who could eligably compete; every other Nightmare was already married anyways. "He'd have better luck trying to use Nadder mating rituals."

Astrid groaned. "Don't make give him ideas. Not if you don't want me to keep touching that soft spot by your chin," she threatened.

"So that you could plummet to your death?" I questioned, albeit jokingly with my face in a grin. "Besides, you like punching Snotlout!"

"True," she admitted. And then she gave me a small jab at my the face of my neck. "Almost as much as I like punching you."

"Hey!" I said, but for that, she gave me another jab, as if toying with me. All be it, I didn't exactly mind it.

"That's for being someone I like punching!" she declared, clearly she was messing with me; that that I minded that coming from her. "Now move it before I decide to give you another one!"

"Gee, now I almost don't want to enter." I said, but instead of wasting even more time, I went forward and dove straight into the peak of the seemingly extinct volcano.

The first thing I became aware of in the darkness was the sound of dragons talking amongst themselves when they became aware that a Night Fury and a human have both arrived in the Den. The dragons were all situated in the various raised platforms that dotted the enter chamber, above the deep, clouded abyss that hid their King from veiw.

"Is that Dead Wing's eldest?" said one, starting a slew of comments from the other dragons.

"Hadn't he disappeared without a word?"

"What is he wearing?"

"And why does he bring that small Herd runtling into the King's Domain?"

After hearing the same four or five questions asked over and over again, I tuned them out.

I wanted to see the King first, not only because it was polite, but I figured if anyone knew where my Mom was it had to be her boss. Yet, my focus wavered when I heard one of the dragons. "My Liege! You've returned at last!"

Turning my head, I found one of the dragons, an old Gronckle, one

that I recognized from the last time I had been here. Beside the old Gronckle were somewhere over a dozen other familiar dragons of various types. Dimly, I remembered last time I saw these dragons, they swore an oath to serve under me and accepted them. I guess since I had to be taken back from the dragons while I was unconscious, I forgot about themâ€¦ and that made me feel very guilty. Deciding that maybe I could spare a few moments to greet them and to explain a few things, I flew toward the dragons.

Once I got closer, the dragonsâ€¦ my servants all backed away, giving me room to land on their platform. As I set my feet down on the stone platform, they all gave me various bows and accolades.

"Squire Night Fury!" shouted one Nadder

"We just _knew _you weren't gone!" said younger Nightmare, one around half the size of Hookfang.

"Oh, yes, when the Herd had abducted you, many of our Kin have chosen other masters, but we knew to stay faithful!" announced a Zipple back, each head saying one word at a time.

"Uhâ€¦ thank you," I said. Now I just felt more guilty. Here I was, completely forgetting about them all, yet they still decided to call me their liege, their master. I didn't come back for them, it was only coincidence I we met again. That was not how a responsible Chief should have acted.

"And what is this creature that you've taken?" said the Nadder.

"It is clearly some sort of small Herd creature!" said the Nightmare

"And yet," said the Nadder. "It is so hideous, Look at its tail and feet. They parts are clearly a reference to my Breed. This creature must be some sort of prever mockery..."

I didn't take any stretch of the imagination to imagine Astrid's glare. I was the target of it more times than I care to admit. The other dragons rightfully backed off, all afraid of the much smaller, mostly unarmed human atop my shoulders. "Hey!" she snapped. "I know what you're saying and I don't like it!"

"It speaks?" questioned the Nadder, stunned. In fact, Astrid's words alone sent the dragons into a daze. I knew they never spoke to a human before, mostly because of the whole issue with languages, so this was probably their first time any of them ever heard a human speaking in their own tongue.

"Yes, I can talkâ€¦" Astrid moaned. "And I know when I'm being insulted."

The Nadder was clear the most upset of the dragons, the others were still trying to wrap their minds around the whole situation "Insulted? You'reâ€¦ you'reâ€¦ some sort of aberration! You should be thrown at our Lord's feet to be judged." the Nadder said after a struggle.

"Been there and done that!" said Astrid.

"I should-" The Nadder was about to come up with a reply, probably take down Astrid, but the old Gronckle intervened before the whole situation could escalate violently.

The old dragon bowed to me. "My liege, I do not know for what purpose, you bring this creature into our realm, but I advise you to destroy it or offer it to our King"

I shook my head, rejecting the idea before it even began. Astrid had my back and I had hers. "_Sh_e-" I corrected him. "-is my friend." If Astrid's word stunned the dragons for a moment, then my simple declaration caused them to give me looks of disbelief and wonder aloud if this was some sort of twisted nightmare the dream kind, not the dragon kind.

I felt a playful jab at the back of my neck, Astrid giving me her affectionate punching treatment. "Good going, Hiccup," she laughed. "You sure always know the right things to say to upset people." She was clearly enjoying the look of the Nadders' face the most.

"But my leige surely you can't even consider this _thing _as worthy of that?" asked the Nadder.

"Astrid is my friend," I insisted.

"It, she, has a name?" questioned the younger Nightmare. It probably had to do with the fact that most dragons never had their own names until they really did something to set themselves apart from others.

"An ill fitting one at that! That thing being 'beautiful?'" said a different Nadder. He received a warning glare and took a step back.

"Hiccup, I think we should go I know you used to put up with this sort of thing, but I'm not going to stand for this," Astrid told me.

"No, not yet," I said. Not until I get something else done first. For the first time since I had seen. "Guy, I'm sorry I haven't come back for a few months, but I'm here now and I'll be here for much of the Winter. Now I'm not going to be at the Nest all the time, but I'll be back every day because I have business with the King."

The dragons all nodded, their tails flailing and their heads bowing. They clearly accepted that and they seemed like they were looking forward to it. I felt guilty for not telling them everything, but after spending months not telling Dad about Toothless, it was easy to not reveal anything.

Then I continued. "But before I see the King, there are something I need to tell you."

"What is it you need our leige?" declared a Zippleback who had both heads speaking in unison.

"You must follow Astrid's commands as much as you'd follow any mine or the King's," I said to them.

They all fell silent, frozen. I would have said that they were

stunned, but that didn't fully convey what my words did to them this time. None of the dragons so much as blinked or even breathed in and out. They were frozen, like I had turned them into statues.

Then, I continued, "Astrid is my friend and someone I trust in. You are to obey her in everything she says, understand? Next, you cannot call her a monster or a freak or some other unflattering thing, you have to apologize to her. Even now."

The still dragons didn't move or blink, but I knew they were still listening and many of them were not exactly pleased to hear what I was telling them.

So, I decide to wrap up what I wanted to say. "If any of you aren't willing to stomach that, then you're free to leave my service; I don't have any need for you if you're not willing to also serve her."

Nothing happened for a solid minute; the dragons were all still stuck in whatever poses they were in the moment I gave them my command. Eventually though, they started to move again, like they had suddenly remembered what it was like to move themselves.

"Then I shall leave, you then," said a distraught Nadder before flying off. A few other dragon left the platform, too, each giving their own apologies or excuses as they flew away. That process continued until the platform had been divested of maybe half of its original occupants. As it turned out, most of the one that left were Nadders who felt Astrid was mocking them specifically. The leftovers all spoke to themselves, wondering if staying was the right thing or not.

The old Gronckle, clearly the wisest of them all, was the first to bow down to me. "I do not like this one, my liege, but I shall not abandon you."

"As will we," said a Zippleback.

I nodded to them. "Good. I'll see you later then; I have to speak with the King." I said before I myself had left.

I descended downward the chasm, Astrid still ontop of me. She hadn't said a word or did anything to me after I made my declaration. If my words froze the dragons for a minute or two, then mine might have hit Astrid all the more.

Finally, she spoke to me the moment we were away from the other dragons. "You know you didn't have to do that."

"I did," I told her. It felt odd to be the one giving orders for once. I felt like my own words, my own decisions had meaning; I was the one in control of things, what I wanted mattered and others followed my command.

"But why?"

"For you," I said, hesitantly.

I heard Astrid give a small chuckle. "You know Hiccup, you're a pretty good guy," she said to me. "I'm sad never got to know that

until, well..."

"Same here!" I said mournfully.

It was times like this that reminded me that the worst part of being a dragon was I would never have a chance at her. Now more than ever, I felt like I actually might have won her over yet I can't take it, not when we were both destined for different paths. I mean, if our friendship now ever grew into something more... what'd we have to do then?

"Is something wrong, Hiccup?"

"Uh, nothing! Nothing at all!" I blurted out. "I mean, it's not exactly a secret I had a crush on Astrid... it's pretty obvious that every other boy my age did. But I still can't help but feel embarrassed to tell her about. So, I decide may the best way to avoid embarrassment from still having a crush on her was to change the topic to something a little more serious. "Hey, we better hurry!"

Then, I performed a steep dive, forcing Astrid to hold on tightly to the saddle as we descended fast as an arrow traveling in flight. "Hiccup!" she shouted on top of her lungs.

At the last moment, I extended my wings, catching whatever air I could underneath. My descent slowed to a crawl and I landed gently onto one of the three bottom platforms, the ones nearest to the King and just barely covered by a layer of fog. I was actually quite surprised none of the Knights or Flight Commanders were gathered there right now, but then again, I doubted the King needed anyone to stay by him to protect him. Mom was probably out patrolling, so maybe I'd have an easier time to do what I intended to do.

Astrid got off of me and hobbled a few steps, looking weary. "Remind me... never to go flying with you whenever you decide to do that!" she groaned.

I did a little sheepish grin. "Sorry!" I told her. Hopefully Astrid wouldn't hate me too much for what I just did.

Bringing her hands to her temples, Astrid did what she could to get over what must have been an annoying migraine since all the blood must have rushed up to her head. "Right, so now we face the King?"

"To find Mom..." And maybe see if she could come home for the winter.

I made my way closer to the edge of the platform I was on, ready to do probably what was both the safest and most dangerous thing I ever did. "Ruler of all Kin!" I shouted into the foggy abyss below. "I seek an audience with you!"

As soon as I said those words, it felt like the entire world shook, as if the World Tree itself, Yggdrasil was being rattled on like a sapling. A voice, one that came from a being that easily dwarfed my own existence reached out from below me, resonating in my mind like I was listening to Odin or Thor, a god, speak. **"Arise, **eldest son of Dead Wings and speak." ****

I could just barely see the King's massive form in the darkness and fog. I shivered, almost at once realizing how insignificant I truly was. But no, I had to do this. Steeling myself, I spoke once again. "My name is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third!" I shouted. I might as well, say something, anything to help me get used to talking to...him.

"**I should warn you, child, about clinging to your old name. You still yet cling to a life that devalued your own existence. You should have just let it go to live amongst your Kin." **Suddenly, I felt a wave of crippling depression, like I suddenly became aware of how right the King's words were. No one on Berk, reallyâ€¦ really valued me as more than annoyance, a pest who sometimes did something goodâ€¦ I mean, it's my fault that pretty much everything in the past few months happened, right?

And then, I felt a warm hand being placed upon my shoulders, calling me back fromâ€¦ wherever the King sent me. Astrid stepped forward and told the King these words, "I valued Hiccup, enough I was willing to trade something away! Now I'm share his fate! And I don't regret it!"

If I ever had any guilt and shame for the whole mess I put Astrid through, back when she took part in the same curse I was under, that was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of pride. I was not alone in this.

The King's head poked itself out of the fog and looked at us, his many sets of eyes seemingly able to peer into our very souls. He laughed at us, almost amused. "**Nor, should you regret, young Kindred," **said the King. "**I can already see that you'd make a bold, yet beautiful Nadder. You are not at all a fragile rose in a garden that is beautiful for a time yet withers and dies at the slightest, but an hardened gemstone, enduring yet fit for nobility."**

Astrid stopped moving, her eyes staring blanking at the massive dragon. Was she receiving a vision from the King? Or something far worse?

"Hey!" I shouted at the King. My fear of him vanished right the moment I knew he was doing something to her. "Let her go!" The King was not going toâ€¦ unmake her, not like he almost did to me.

The moment I said that, Astrid averted her gaze from the massive dragon and began breathing deeply; she was free.

The King's massive gaze turned back to me. "**Worry not eldest of Dead Wings; I have done nothing to her other than propose a possible future."**

For a moment, my eyes became cloudy as I began to see what the King had planned for me. In the vision, I saw myself, older, wiser, and more successful, yet still a Night Fury. I don't know how I did it, but I forced it away, bringing myself back into the real world. "We're not here because we want to join you!" I blared.

"**Most impressive, child. Most Kin do not even understand how to fortify their own mental defenses. Truly you are a prodigy." **The

King seemed almost amused, as if I was some favorite student who did something super impressive, like Gobber when I created my first sword. That disturbed me more than the fact that this being once tried to twist my own memories to his own desires.

Astrid, still a little shaken from whatever the King showed her, "We're here have business with you

Done flatting me, the King's expression turned hard, "**Then me, children what is you seek?"**

With whatever resolve I managed to pull up still burning with in me, I told the King. "I want to bring my Mom home!"

"**But she is home, amongst her Kin," **said the King. What went unsaid was his counter proposal, that we belonged here as well, but Astrid and I both knew it was there. "**You should instead** **offer to send those suffer the same affliction to me; the Corrupt One's curse cannot be broken. Our new Kin should accept their fate and abandon their old homeland."**

The King's words didn't rattle me as much as his praised did, but it still sent a shiver up my spine. The King knew all about the dragons on Berk, the ones suffering Alvin's curse. I figure he probably still had informants or paid attention to rumors in the Viking lands. Yet, he clearly knew something I didn't. I had suspected the curse that fell upon Mom and her crew might have been the same the one Alvin brought to Berk. "What are you talking about? Who is this Corrupt One?" I muttered aloud.

The King gave a hearty belly laugh one that shook loose stone. "**Young Night Fury, I would imagine that having learned of the ways of the Oathbreaker, you would know who I speak about." **

I couldn't think up of anything. I knew he was talking about Odin, since Oathbreaker was one of his titles, but that didn't help me other than let me know that the King knew about Nordic tradition. "Because I should know everything about what the gods do," I said dryly. "I don't know who or what you're talking about."

The King gave a laugh again. "**I suppose it cannot be helped then. Stories histories are forgotten so easily. I saw there to see the Kings in the Desert abandoned their own traditions to follow the Sons of the Wolf, only to in turn forget their own past to f" **

"Who are you talking about?" Astrid questioned. Neither of us knew who the King was talking about, the King was pretty much talking in riddles.

The King shook his massive his head. "**No one that matters to you**." **Suffice it to say, I know from experience what it is like to be forgotten Civilizations rise, fall, and remain buried, from first unto last, from the mighty to the weak. All ways of life come to an end."**

Whatever he was talking about, I had the feeling I didn't want to know too much more. I mean, did I really want to focus on the fact that maybe one day, there might not be any more Vikings? So, I decided to get us back on topic, something more understandable and comfortable to deal with. "We're not here for this!" I shouted, just

so I had the King's attention. "I just want to bring my Mom home, even if it's just for the Winter! Momâ€¦. Dad, they deserve a chance to see each other again."

I immediately wished the King didn't have his eyes locked on me. Any moment now, I imagined I'd turn into a puddle. **"I will not allow her, she is clearly not one of the Herd. She does not fit in." **

"I know how to turn her back!" I shouted. Astrid and the King both looked at me, as if they were surprised.

"**Child, I know that you have great potential, but in all of the lands I had traveled in, the greatest sorcerer-priests could never abolish the Corrupt One's curse. "**

"I don't intend to!" I said with a cocky grin on my face. "If I could change her backâ€¦ would you allow her to return home?"

"**I have no control over my servantsâ€¦ they can choose what they desire in their free time. So long as tributes are met and duties are followed as is required, I have no need to restrict the freedoms of my lesser Kin. I suppose if even my greatest servants wish to spend whatever leisure they had on suchâ€¦ deviant activities, I have nothing to complain about," **said the King, all but giving me permission to take my Mom back home. Nowâ€¦ all I had to do was see her and figure out a way to put my plan into action...** "Still, I question your methodology, your technique. By what power do you seek to unravel such a potent enchantment?"**

"Just a crazy ideaâ€¦ I don't know if it'd work yet, but it made sense." I felt the King's will trying to reach into my mind, wondering what I intended to do. I let him in, only enough to see what I had thought of.

His smirk could have bisected a village. **"Most impressive, a cunning plan," **he mused**. "So you intend for this creation to circumvent the curse entirelyâ€¦" **

I nodded. "I lack the understandingâ€¦ or the ability to make it myself, at least for now, but I figure you can take care of one of those problems."

"**And you wish to bargain it from me? To use my own understanding of the fundamentals of our universe to create your desired enchantment?"**

Astrid grabbed my head. "Hiccup, are you insane? I mean, not only are you going to let him go through your mind _again, _you're also asking something that's going to cost you. How are you supposed to get the King to agree to this?"

"**The Nadder-to-be is correct. From where I stand, I do not see what you could offer me. The affliction left by the Corrupt One is many things, but to our Kind it should be seen as a blessing. It offers the Herd a chance to rise above their lot; who am I do deny them that? They have a chance to finally prove their worth, to be elevated as Kindred."**

To that, I argued, "Who are you to decide who should be what?Some of us like _our own Kin!_" What i had just said was probably a blasphemy

to the King. I had just called humans, whom he regarded as animals befitting of the title of 'Kin'. "We're not beasts! Let us decide who we want to be!"

I felt Astrid grab onto my saddle, ready to take off at a moment's notice. She and I both knew we were mere insects compared to the King. But I didn't feel like running. The King's gaze felt like it could reduce me to ashes, even when I was coated in fire proof scales. I didn't waver.

The King did not crush us. He seemed to consider my words, as if thinking them over carefully. ***"Such a pity, you could have made a fine Flight Commander. Few are so brave as you."**

"I'm not brave," I told the King. "I'm scared out of my mind."

The King laughed again, nearly sending a stalactite crashing down near me. ***"Very well, child, but in exchange I demand two things from you." **

My heart pounded. It looked like my insanity was about to pay off. If the King could give me the knowledge to create what I wanted to make, I needed to do everything in my power to make sure that bargain was completed. I couldn't let Mom or all of Berk down. "Tell me."

***"Before I tell you the second request, I require an answer to this question." **said the King. ***"With what you request from me, in theory what you ask should also apply to your boon; you could return to the form you covet so. So, I ask this question, would you remain Kin or Herd?" **

The answer was something I've been thinking hard about for a while. So, I gave the King the my honest reply. "I don't know, I can't make that choice." The King frowned, not satisfied with my answer, so I had explain it. "Sometimes, I like the fact that I can fly around or that my body was large enough to let me carry others; I like being stronger than I used to be. Other times, I wish I had my hands again. I want to work earth and fire into metal. I want to create things." It would also mean, I might actually have a chance at Astrid, but I doubted the King would understand such a thing.

***"But which path would you choose then?" **

"If it came down to it I wouldn't choose." I said. "And I don't have to." Yes, I knew it was a copout, but really big life changing decisions like what body I wanted to have to rest of my life were not easy decisions. Especially since I keep going back and forth on the whole being a Night Fury thing, sometimes multiple times in the same hour.

The King's nostrils flared, smoke spewing forth. ***"I suppose that is fair" considering what you intend to create." **

Astrid gave me a look that told me she wondered what I had been planning. It should have been clear to her, but I guess she never considered the possibility. "I'll tell you about it later," I said to her. "What's the second thing you need from me?" I asked the King.

"**The second part is merely a requirement to be able to impart the knowledge you seek. One cannot simply these secrets without preparation and understanding. I will need you to visit me every day until you fully comprehend it.**"

I nodded; accepting the terms. In order to learn, I knew the King would probably need to get inside my mind again. I hoped that in the process, the King would not try to overwrite my memoriesâ€¦ I mean, he had Mom's permission last time. I don't know if Mom took back that permission or if it expired, but a part of me still worried. "I'll come by every noon"

Astrid clearly didn't approve of my decision. "I'll have to come just to make sure you don't get yourself in trouble again." I gave the shield maiden in training wry smile, glad that she still had my back.

"One last thing," I said to the King. "What will it cost me to know where my Mom is?"

"**Nothing," **said the King. His tone was flat and neutral, like he was trying to suppress something, an emotion, and doing a really good job at it. **"It should be the prerogative of children to know of their own mothersâ€¦ Regardless, Dead Wings has been assigned elsewhere today. If you desire, I shall inform her to stay until you come visit me in the next morning." **

I nodded. "Thank you," I said for the first time bowing, if only out of gratefulness, then out of formality. For all of his dislike of humans, I couldn't help but feel like the King was honestly a good man... dragon... maybe god or demigod might be the best way to say what he was. He was fair, almost reasonable to his own Kind... our Kin.

"**May the ocean protect you," **said the King. And then Astrid and I left him.

Anticipation bubbled in every fiber of my being. Now everything was in place for me set everything straight. Mom, Dad, Toothless, we'll be a complete family for the first time inâ€¦ ever.

Tomorrow was the start of everything.

* * *

><p>Tonight was the start of everything.<p>

Anticipation bubbled in every fiber of my being. Now everything was in place to set everything straight. I would settle my debt with Stormfly and make Alvin pay for the things he did to my family, my villageâ€¦ and my old teacher.

I could see our destination, maybe severalâ€¦ knots away, right? Or maybe it was a dozen knots, a hundred? Either way, it didn't matter; in the distance, I could see lights of campfires giving away that there were people active and about. Most people probably would have thought it was just a normal Viking settlement, but the dark silhouettes of patrolling dragons overhead proved otherwise. And as far as I knew, only Berk or the Outcasts had dragons acting as guards. And since I was pretty sure I was of Berk, that left me with

only one possible conclusion.

On board the Bog Burglar ship, there was nothing but darkness; we weren't allowed to use even the dimmest of torch lights, for fear of betraying our position to the Outcasts; Camicazi's orders.

Still, it wasn't too bad. The moon was out, giving just enough light for me to prepare. I readied my crossbow, making sure that all of the parts and pieces were in working order. I checked the small pouch of bolts strapped onto my belt, making sure I had enough; a each bolt was a relatively thick, heavy piece of wood with a barbed steel tip that could punch through mail with relative ease. Hopefully, I wouldn't need to use it too much.

Camicazi stood at the forwardâ€| starboard most section of the ship, looking ahead with a grimace. It wasn't hard to figure out that she was nervous, maybe worried about how badly we could botch the upcoming heist. I mean, how many of us actually spent time practicing sneak around? I'm pretty sure that the only person who was looking forward to this little excursion with any sort of confidence was Stormfly.

Speaking of which, the Nadder in disguise approached Camicazi, a wicked gleam of enthusiasm on her face. "I can't wait much longer!" she exclaimed. "Is everything ready?"

"Hm, I suppose I am." Camicazi said, half-weary and half-cherry. She was definitely trying to keep her spirits up.

"Soâ€| what's our plan?" I asked. Stormfly narrowed her eyes, almost glaring at me, but then at Camicazi. I guess, maybe once in a blue moon, even I would have a good point.

"Oh that's easy!" Camicazi said, with more forced yet at the same time something more genuine was underneath that. "We get in, get out, and rip off Alvin!"

"That'sâ€| oddly simple," I heard Fishlegs mutter from somewhere behind me.

"And very nondescript," added Meatlug.

"It's always a good idea to beâ€| flexible when coming up with a plan," said Camicazi, her smile somewhere between forced and real. "Anyways, fellas, tonight marks the start of the big heist. None of us are going home until we get what we came for!"

Stormfly's smile looked terrifying enough to make me look awayâ€| yet no matter what, I couldn't break my gaze away from her teeth. Was I afraid of them? "Good," said the red haired girl.

"Alright, ladies," the Bog Burglar captain said to her crew. "You know the drill!"

Whatever the 'drill' was the women on board understood exactly what they were going to do. We approached the island not going directly into the Outcast camp, mostly because the hastily constructed area they had for a harbor was frozen over. Instead, we veered right to hide behind a large set of pillars that were just barely touching the iced over waters.

The first and simplest leg of our so called 'heist' was to walk on the frozen over sea water of the harbor. It was pretty much self explanatory. The only major problem we had was that the ice was a little thinner than it was back home, probably because everything was slightly warmer than it was further North. Fishlegs and Meatlug had a few close calls, almost falling through the thin sheets of frost. They didn't but an adult probably would have ended up falling into the icy water just underneath the surface.

The next part though was when actual sneaking skills started being needed. As we approached the frozen harbor, we hid behind a large stack of crates to avoid notice from a pair of Outcast guards standing watch outside a few buildings of some sort. "Alright, that's the Harbormaster's quarters. So that looks like a good spot for it..." Camicazi muttered, clearly to only herself.

"Camicazi" I whispered to her, snapping her out of her trance.

"Oh, Toothless." said the Bog Burglar, still not taking her eyes away from the pair of guards outside to build.

"Is there something important we should know?"

"Oh, just thinking up escape plans," said the Bog Burglar. "Always a smart idea for that."

I nodded, understanding how vital it sounded to have a plan for that. Still Camicazi has been a little off lately. I would have thought that maybe the inherent danger of our burglary attempt would have probably excited her a little more, enough to make her sound like her old self, but right now she was just so cautious. Something was bothering her. Or maybe she realizes the consequences of failure.

"Anyways," Camicazi drew the group's attention to her and then whispered another part of her plan, "Stormfly, you're in the front. If anyone gets in our way, you know what to do"

The Nadder clearly liked the sound of that. "With pleasure."

"Fishlegs, Meatlug, you're right behind her. If she needs extra muscle, you'll give it to her."

Both of the larger teenagers moved where Camicazi told them. Well, technically, Meatlug wasn't a teenager, but she certainly was around our age.

"And then lastly, Toothless, you're right behind them. That crossbow of yours should work wonders if we ever need it."

"I never miss," I said, a very strong hint of pride in my tone.

Stormfly gave me a wary look, but that's all I got from her. She can't deny the fact that I always scored better than her on blasting day

"But what about you?" I asked Camicazi.

"Well, I of course would watch the rear flank. Best someone who knew what she was doing to watch from behind, most people don't watch their own backs of course," said the Bog Burglar. She wasn't being literal, but she was right. Even dragons who had weapons on their tails knew their backsides were vulnerable. Most dragons don't have the ability to have full vision of everything around them. Night Furies had next best thing, the ability to 'see' rough shapes in an area by echolocation, and even then it had its limits.

"Alright, so where do we go next?" I asked the Bog Burglar.

Camicazi took a look over the boxes, just barely concealed from the guards nearby. I think she was getting a closer view of some makeshift buildings and cobbled together tents atop a nearby cliff face. "From what I know, there should be a tunnel entrance somewhere over there leading straight into Alvin's home base."

"Again?" I questioned. The first time we met Alvin, he used a set of labyrinthine underground tunnels for everything. Prisons, special blacksmithing and magic working facilities, training rooms, barracks, and armories. Really, I can respect living in a cave; I did it for pretty much my whole life, but that manâ€¦ creatureâ€¦ whatever, really took things too far.

Camicazi shrugged. "Sometimes, it's easier to just find a cave and start digging it out rather than building a hundred houses."

"Even easier if you don't do the digging yourself," said Fishlegs, listing off some fact from that arcane study he called 'geology'. "Water erosion either from ice or running water can shape even the toughest stone."

"Though it takes many years for progress of any sort to occur. Rainwater seeping in through stone while very effective at wearing down is also very infrequent," added Meatlug, apparently knowing this stuff too. I guess it was a bard's job to know these sorts of things. "Still, there are many cave systems all over, many have been forming for untold eons."

"It's even slower if we're talking ice erosion. Constant thawing, seeping, and refreezing could take many years for each phase the farther North you go," Fishlegs said.

For once Stormfly and I both agreed on something, neither of us cared enough about caves to dwell on them for too long. Camicazi didn't stop them though, either because it kept those two from running away in terror or revealing our location because of a terrified shout.

With a only a word, we moved to the next area, an area full of hastily assembled shacks and patchwork tents and that was being generous. The Outcast assembled this place in the span of maybe too weeks, yet it looked so much older. Everything had an almost scavenged feel, as if the Outcast used nothing but discarded scraps of metal and moldy old drift buildings looked like they could barely protect against the elements and I did not want to imagine sleeping inside any of them.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see a small crowd of Outcast warriors, a little thinner than normal huddling together by the fire. They were all giving minor chit chat, begging that things could have been different or even considering getting covered in scale might not be all that much of a big deal if it meant not worrying about frostbite. I probably should have felt sorry for them, but they were the enemy; they chose this path.

As we neared our destination, Camicazi had guided us more directly.

"Better hide over here!" she said, letting us slip directly behind a large man who probably could have taken on all five of us.

Overall, we did better than I thought we would. No one caught us as we made our way to the entrance to a large cave. Strangely, no one guarded the entrance, but I figure Alvin might have decided it might have been unnecessary due to all of the patrols going around camp. Probably never imagined a small team like ours would get through so easily.

"That's nineteen groups, " Fishlegs stated.

"Fourteen close calls and five who never realized we were even there," Meatlug clarified.

I took in a deep breath, as if I held my breath for a whole hour. I was starting to feel exhausted from all of my anxiety. I kept constantly fearing that the loud noises from a single fight was all it took to put us all in chains or worse, on a trophy rack. What if Alvin decided to turn us into dragons just because our heads would be easier to taxidermy that way?

Camicazi gave a big grin to the two larger teenagers. "My that awfully seems a little low. Alvin won't know what hits him when we make our move."

Stormfly was ready to draw her sword at a moment's notice ready to strike. "I wouldn't object to hitting him."

"I know you won't," replied Camicazi. She then started rummaging through her pockets. "Give me a moment, I'll just need to get that map I got with me."

"You have a map?" I asked, feeling a little more relieved now that I wasn't constantly aiming down my crossbow's sight for the best results.

"Sure, I do!" Camicazi bellowed, holding her map in hand. "Just a little something I got from our reliable source." Whoever was supplying Camicazi with all the information we needed apparently did a very good job at it; we had exactly what we needed already. "Now, onward!"

We all gave each other a look and entered the cave. It was oddly warm inside for some reason, as if it was suddenly summer again. I didn't know how Alvin managed that, but at the same time, I was glad to be out of the cold, at least for a little while.

Unlike the twisted and intentionally made confusing passages of

Outcast Island, the cave system seemed a little more straight forward. For one, there were far less tunnels, probably because Alvin lacked the time to have people dig up extra dead ends or the cave came with less stray passageways. There were also signs indicating the way out and any important sections like the dining area or any slave pits.

One of the sections Camicazi took us through was labeled on the map as 'Sleeping quarters'. The area was huge; a large cavern set aside entirely for Outcast warriors. Unlike their counterparts above, they weren't complaining at all about their living conditions; in fact, I doubt they could do anything but snore loudly. They were clearly content from the looks of their faces.

For a moment, I found it strange Alvin had soldiers sleeping on the outside, the cavern these warriors were in wasn't full in the least. Sure, there were lots of men and some women sleeping all over on the floor, but there was still plenty of room. I didn't know if Alvin could fit his entire force down in that underground section, but there could have been a whole lot more and yet there wasn't!

Turning my back for just a moment, I saw Camicazi grimace as if she was disturbed by the sight of it all.

"Something wrong?" I asked her.

She seemed to think about that for a moment as if considering her reply. "Oh, just the thought of all these warriors getting up to fight us allâ€¦"

"No thanks," I muttered. But it made sense. Even if I was a Night Fury a dozen times better than I used to be or some sort of heroic Viking nobleman, I doubted I would last long against a force like that. How many of them were there in that huge cavern? A hundred? A thousand?

As soon as we left the sleeping quarts, I put the place out of my mind. It probably wasn't important enough for me to consider it, not as long as none of the Outcasts didn't know we were here.

We then passed by an area called the 'dragon holding pens' .I'll admit, I didn't think much of the other two areas the Outcasts gathered to sleep at when I first saw them. That all changed the moment I saw where they put their dragons as a sudden realization hit me like was being sent by a catapult; the other areas did not allow dragons.

To our right was a passageway that led to a section of the tunnel complex that catered specifically to dragons according to the map. We could see a small glimpse from where we stood and what saw unnerved us greatly, most especially Stormfly.

We all had our gazes locked a rows of iron barred prison cell, each filled to the brim with dragons, almost to the point of bursting. Most of them I figure might not have been born that way, most likely changed by whatever power Alvin dabbled in, the very thing we were here to steal. None of the dragons saw us or if they did, they didn't care. Most of them had these blank, partially empty looks in their eyes that were somewhere between half scowl and half despair.

"How can anyone be so cruel? Aren't these false Kin in Alvin's employ?" Stormfly questioned, as if the whole scene was just outside of her frame of mind. She was clearly the most disturbed out of all of us.

"No, no they're not," said Camicazi, all of her cheer and enthusiasm seemingly drained from her body. It was the most disturbing thing I had ever seen.

Whatever that meant, I was sure I didn't want to know. So, I changed the subject just a little to something that seemed slightly more hopeful at the time. "Alvin has got a thing for imprisoning others, human or dragon. Mostly to sell them into slavery or to sell them for a ransom. My brother and I, he wanted to extort Father. I guess that might apply to the people he turns into dragons." Gee, the devaluation of people into nothing more than property, what a warm and safe thought?

That seemed to give Stormfly a little something to think about. "You beat him then? You earned your freedom." Stormfly question

"My brother did..." I said. "I just ran out of ammunition."

"Which is why you tried hitting him with rocks when everything else failed," cheered Camicazi, as if the thought somehow made her her cheery, perky self.

Stormfly gave me a look of disbelief, like she couldn't imagine that I could last long enough fighting Alvin barely armed as I was at the time. "I don't believe thatâ€|" she muttered aloud.

"Good," I told her. "I don't eitherâ€|" my reply seemed to give Stormfly a slight chuckle, letting me see those nice teeth she had.

"Say guys?" we all turned to look a Fishlegs, hiding off in some nearby corner, trying to stay close to a nearby torch. "It's kinda dark hereâ€|" right?

Stormfly and Camicazi gave each other a look as if that was all that was needed for them to have a detailed conversaton. "Well, we're not far from our destination," said the Bog Burglar.

We then left the dragon holding pen, but my mind would not let go of the place Looking back, I noticed there was a distinct lack of dragons in the other areas the Outcasts were in. There was just something about that arrangement that bothered me; but I didn't know what.

As we got closer to wherever it was that we needed to go, I could hear Camicazi muttering to herself again, as if unsure and anxious. "Am I ready to do this? Can I go on?" I heard her say a few times.

I didn't blame her, I was thinking the same thing too. Everything was fine now, but that wouldn't mean that things wouldn't be changing. What if I messed up and costed everyone their lives? I practically ruined Stormfly's once already, could I do that a second time?

She led us to a cast iron door. "We're here," she said.

Everyone got anxious, now was the time for our heist to be put into motion.

"Meatlug, Fishlegs, flank Stormfly as she enters," said the Bog Burglar Heir as she dug through her pockets. "We'll be watching the entrance.

She pulled out a key and gently opened the door, letting the other three in.

The room was completely dark all except for an object in the center of the room. Alvin's spear glow faintly red, just enough for us to see it in the complete absence of light. Truth be told wasn't so much a spear as much as it was a gnarled piece of metal slapped onto an old withered tree branch. And now all we had to do was approach it and take it and we'd be on our way home, no fighting whatsoever.

Stormfly was the closest to the cursed weapon, just within arms reach of it. She was about to reach out and grab it, but at the last moment, some unseen force shoved her away from the spear. Piercing red eyes appeared next to the cursed object and I suddenly knew things were about to get a whole lot worse.

Stormfly landed on her feet and quickly drew her sword, ready to fight, but it was no use. The blade was thrown out of her hands almost as quickly as she took. Fishlegs and Meatlug tried charging at the attack, but they were lifted up by their necks and thrown like rag dolls,

My heart froze as my worst fears were confirmed by a shout, "Did you really think you'd get the drop ol' Alvin did'ja!?"

I could barely make out Alvin's silhouette in the darkness, but it was still mostly human. How long it remained mostly was up to debate, but that didn't matter. I raised my crossbow takinging aim to fell the monster that threatened my friends.

â€| Only for my weapon to be thrown out of my hands and into the dark room I was trying to aim at. Then the door was slammed shut, making me lose sight of my friends facing down a terrifying monster. I tried to twist open the door knob, only for it not to turn; it was locked, maybe automatically. I wanted to pound at the door, to pry it open with my bare hands but I was simply too stunned by what had happened to do anything but gawk. "Why did you do that Camicazi?" I screamed at her. She gave me a look that she knew of her own guilt, but said nothing.

In a single motion, the Bog Burglar Heir disarmed me and pulled the cast iron door shut, effectively damning my friends to face Alvin until theyâ€| I didn't want to think about it. The thought that Stormfly would be torn to bits horrified me more than anything else. Working up the resolve and forcing Camicazi's actions out of my mind, I tried with what little strength I had in a desperate attempt to free my friends. I could barely hear the sounds of what must have been a chaotic frenzy just on the other side.

The Bog Burglar then pushed me away from the door, with a swift kick to my side. I fell to the ground, but I quickly picked myself up.

"Let me through you!" I screamed. "We have to save them!" Why was she doing this anyways? Did Alvin bribe her or anything?

"I'm sorry, Toothless," she said in a tone that I could tell had some very deep regret. "I like you, you're pretty good, for a boy that isâ€¦ which makes this so much harder."

The last thing I saw was a small fist coming at my eyes.

* * *

><p>Major point to whoever figures out who Kings in the Desert and Sons of the Wolf are. They're a big hint at the King's origins, but not in the way you'd think.

I wonder if the clues I left behind here will be enough for you to figure things out.

Also, yeah, to anyone who guessed what Camicazi was going to do this chapter, major points, but understand had to be secretive about it. Now as to _why _she did it, well, you'll have to read to find out.

****This chapter was delayed by one day because during production, I realized it was going to be longer than usual. This chapter is about 10k words long, mostly because I had just so much information to unload.. Also, this puts us past the 100k words mark, so, we have that acheivement.****

16. Chapter 16

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Howdy. This chapter came in a day earlier than normal, probably to make up for the day late of last chapter. Then again, last chapter was superlong, whereas this one is average.

I guess it doesn't matter so much if you guys like to read this story.

Please enjoy and leave a comment. See you next week.

* * *

><p>I wonder if Hiccup had mornings where he just woke up feeling like that Thor guy's hammer was being slammed into his skull. My skull felt like it was split open fromâ€¦ whatever it was happened last night. I know I got knocked out...somehow, but I can't seem to remember much more beyond that.<p>

Still, I guess it wasn't as bad as some mornings I had; one time when I was young, I had a nasty cold that lasted for a week. More recently, there was the time I woke up in the middle of the Meatheads trying to 'heal' me and the first time I took a sip of mead. It felt like no matter what I did, I always inevitably ended up with mornings that were either painful, confusing, or if I am really _lucky_, both.

Maybe this was my curse. Whereas my brother tends to knock overshelves or break other people's bones, I ended up with the fate of having terrible morningsâ€¦ yeah, my brother is _definitely _the favored sibling if that's all he had to go through.

I groaned and sat up. I wanted to go back to sleep, to forget about the world until my head stopped feeling like someone was trying to practice for drum concert. Besides, if I didn't, I knew Father or my brother would get me out of bed. But yet, something was wrong, where was my blanket and why did my bed feel soâ€¦ rough?

I fluttered my eyes open, they stung almost worse than my head. Just what did I put them through to get them hurt this bad? I was able to open them, my vision wobbly but I could still tell I was not home any more.

Blinking, my vision slowly returned with my every breath. I could tell I was in some sort of room, one that was probably underground or incorporated natural stone into the building itself. It wasn't very big, but it was enough for me to stretch my legs if I really tried. Subconsciously, I had the feeling it was morning or maybe in the afternoon and yet, I saw no sunlight. The area I was in was dim, barely illuminated by torches on a wall behind some bars coming from the ground up to the ceiling. Touching one, I could tell it was made of icy cold iron. Vaguely, I had the distinct idea that I was in a cage of some sort. Weird, last time I had been in one, I was back in...

With that realization of what exactly happened last night sunk in; the so called heist we were supposed to pull off, the betrayal of my friends by Camicazi, Alvin ambushing my friends, Stormfly facing him with nothing but a sword.

In a jolt, my weariness faded, only to be replaced by a sudden distress. I quickly searched around the room. Three bodies laid down beside meâ€¦ my friends, Fishlegs, Meatlug, Stormfly.

I briefly held my breath, thinking they had died last night. thankfully, I was wrong, they were still breathing, if a little painfully slow.

Each bore injuries from last night's fight. Meatlug and Fishlegs were the the best off. Their faces and arms were marked with assorted bruises, but I didn't think. No, I had the distinct impression they didn't last too long; they might have been taken out fairly quickly, hinted at by the large bumps nearby their temples. Overall, their injuries didn't seem overly major or obviously life threatening, but they were still out cold. I wish they weren't; I really wanted their help.

What I saw scared me and rattled me more than any worry about darkness I had. Stormfly was not looking good, and I didn't mean her choice of wardrobe. She was in human form, but dressed moldy cloth rags while Fishlegs, Meatlug, and I were still dressed in whatever we left Berk in. Other, newer pieces of linen covered her body underneath those rotted garments, stained red from seeping blood. Her right arm probably bore the worst of her injuries, it being buried completely in a massive bundle of white cloth.

Worst of all, I could see her neck, since she was missing her silk scarf. There were little scratches, marks of abrasion around her neck, like the rope her amulet had turned on its owner. Vague, but terrifying images flashed into my mind. Stormflyâ€¦ tried to assume her true form, thinking it would give her the edge. She never had the chance to slip the amulet off, Alvin never gave it to her. Instead, he toyed with her, using the string that held the pendant in place. I had a vague idea I knew what it was, but I didn't want to think about it.

And then, I heard a voice, one that was half growl, half snarl and all mocking. "Ya know, for something so small and fragile she's got alot of Spunk...Still, pity about the neck. Maybe I shoulda gutted her in the first place," said a monster coming into view. Since I had last seen him, his skull had elongated, turning more snout-like. His hair and a beard were greatly diminished, most likely being consumed by the masses of scaly carapace that armor his body from head to toe. Speaking of his toes, his feet changed into something like an eagle's talons, ready to grab an enemy at a moment's notice. His tail was part bladed flail, his wings were almost as large as his arms. His claws and teeth gleamed bright as his eyes, making it clear he could kill me a dozen different ways if he wanted to. Alvin's body only vaguely resembled a man's now and he was only going to get less human still.

For a moment, I almost looked at him with fear. Then, I looked at Stormfly and then I realized I was way past that point of fear. I was angry, upset. "What do you want?" I spat out.

"Oh nothing," said the man who was barely a man anymore. It was a wonder how he could still speak Norse while Astrid could only talk to dragons, but I didn't care about that. "Just looking at all the lovely little gifts me newest lieutenant gave me for me birthday, And I have to say she got quite tha taste in gifts." I doubted it really was Alvin's birthday...

"Camicazi," I said, almost in a trance. I saw the Bog Burglar hiding just behind the monster's wings. She didn't look at me, in fact, she just seemed to stare at Stormfly with a look of guilt. Iâ€¦ had no idea what to think. I still couldn't get over the fact that she of all people would betray us like she did. Was she forced? Did she sell us out?

"Right," said Alvin. "Ye Heirs have always been trouble, now I got some of tha' trouble working for me. Shame though, I was promised Stoicks boy...not his runt. But I'll guess you'll do."

I bit back tears that were threatening to well up behind my eyes, sudden realization dawning on me. Camicazi wanted Hiccup on this heist to give him to Alvin. "Camicazi, why did you do this!?" I begged of the Bog Burglar Heir, hoping somehow, she could explain. I was hoping she'd turn around and stab Alvin in the head so that we'd be on our way home by supper. "Why betray us? Why help Alvin?"

Instead, of answering, the the Bog Burglar backed away from the cage, her expression blank as she made her way down the hall. Instead, her silence spoke for her; she was turning her back on us, on me. I wanted to break down, to become nothing but a ball of mush. Why now, after all we did with her? After all the life and death situations

she claimed to enjoy? Did I even know Camicazi at all?

Alvin laughed wickedly, as if amused by the whole sight. "Does it really matter, boy?"

Looking at Alvin, I felt my blood boil, as if all sadness and grief were being consumed to fuel a burning anger. I brought myself as close to the iron bars as I could. I wish I was strong enough to bend iron, or had the fire to melt it. "Are you done toying with us?" I said.

Alvin gave a vicious hateful smirk. In the moment, he looked at Stormfly, I felt my heart sink, my anger was stifled with that single action. "You know, she was a tough fighter. Even when I broke her sword, she still came at me with her firstâ€¦ so I broke her arm."

My throat became hard and I glanced to look at Stormfly's overly bandaged right arm. A part of me wondered if she could ever move it againâ€¦ Hopefully, she could.

"I was thinking she'd make a fine warrior in Valhalla. She was so insistent on fighting to the death; I was almost willing to oblige her." "She just wouldn't quit, even when she had nothing else; no allies, no weapons, no fancy tricks. I even stopped her from using that trick that my lieutenant told me about, that one that turns herself into a dragon!" Alvin bragged. "But I eventually wore her down, I just had to give her a few nasty wounds here and there. You should have seen how much a little girl can bleed... there was blood everywhere when I was finally done with her."

My blood turned ice cold. The way Alvin talked about how he beat Stormfly was unsettling. The way he told it, it sounded like he should have easily snuffed her life outâ€¦ yet he didn't, like letting her live was just another instance of being cruel. "What do you want?" I managed to say, I doubted I was anything resembling commanding.

Alvin's grin made me wish I was a Terrible Terror or a rat, that way I could run and hide. "I could have easily killed her, along with the rest of your friends. If I wanted to I could have ended the fight before it even started," he said, confirming my worst fears. "My Lieutenant claims you are a smart one, think you can guess why I'm keeping them alive?"

I gulped, my throat hard; I already knew the answer and I hated it. "Because of meâ€¦" I said.

Alvin's sharp teeth gleamed evilly. "You're not your brother. If you were I would have ripped off your arm and gorged your eyes out by now. But according to my lieutenant you can do the same tricks he can..."

"To make more people into dragons?" I guess

He laughed and held up his twisted spear, as if amused by my question. "A little," he said chillingly. "But it's not the main reason I'm keeping you alive, I assure you I have something far more interesting."

Whatever he meant by that, I didn't want to know. I looked away from

the monster before me. I felt weak for doing that, but I could not longer look at him without fear of shriveling in terror.

Thankfully, Alvin seemed just about done with me. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him step away, as if ready to crush somethingâ€¦ or someone underfoot. "And don't even think of trying to pull off the same tricks your Brother used last time, because they an't going ta' work! Alvin learns from his mistakes... can you? What am I saying? It's not like ya can pull them off anyway!" He said with pride.

And then the monster stepped out of sight, but not out of mind.

I slammed my back into the nearby wall, maybe a little too hard. I felt like giving up. Just how was I supposed to escape now? I didn't have Camicazi to break open the locks or steal keys. And I imagine that guards will probably be checking in more often than last time, enough that I doubted anything we did would go unpunished. The cage we were in was also quite small, enough that if Meatlug and Stormfly were to change into their true forms, it would crush the rest of us; not that being larger or breathing fire would accomplish anything. We were stuck here.

I don't know how long I sat in the dim torchlight. Time seemed to be irrelevant as I kept watch over my fallen friends. None of them stirred, none of them awoke. All I had for company were my own thoughts. Mostly, I kept kept looking at a far wallâ€¦ or Stormfly.

Looking at Stormfly was the most painful feeling in the world, like a part of me was dying right in front of me. A few months ago, I probably would have wished this fate on her. She was always the one who kept telling me how I only got into the Knighthood because of who I was born to, rather than what I did. I hated her for that and I always wished she would just go away or that Mother would scare her off. That never happened.

Now, I just wished she would be okay. That just made helping Alvin hurt all the the more. She was only alive now because she was a bartering token. She was only alive now because she was a valuable bartering token and I knew if I wanted her to survive, to recover, I would have to aid Alvin. A part of me wished it was a few months ago, when I wouldn't have cared in the least.

And then, I saw Stormfly stir, her body moving with painful groan. She was waking.

My heart leapt and I immediately jumped right next to her, looking at her from above. "Stormfly!" I cried.

Her eyes were fluttering open, trying to bring the world back into focus. Her right arm wasn't moving, it being bound under thick layers of bandages, but her left was being raised in the air. I could tell she was looking at her own palm and then at me.

I grinned, feeling hopeful for the first time all morning. Stormfly was going to awaken.

And then I felt a world of pain. I fell back, landing on my rear with my hand over my right cheek. Stormfly... slapped me.

Before I could ask her why, she already answered me in a pained groaning voice. "Wipe that smirk off your face!" she barked out.

I tried to, I really did; but no matter how much I tried, my smile kept bleeding through. Just seeing the red head sitting up easily made up for all of the dread Alvin gave me and then some.

The Nadder-in-disguise held her temples and shook her head. She was still dizzy apparently and her face was contorted into a pained expression. "What happened?" she groaned.

My smile faltered, my joy temporarily replaced by painful understanding. I told Stormfly what had happened last night, my expression more serious. For the first time in my life, I got the feeling she was actually paying attention for me.

The redhead's pained expression turned hateful, angered. "When I get them, I'llâ€¦ I'llâ€¦" she stammered, probably still thinking how to best have her revenge. She brought up ratherâ€¦ creative suggestions, most of them involving a trebuchet or fire, sometimes both.

A part of me wanted to join her, encourage her of how to best humiliate Camicazi and slay Alvin, but I still couldn't get over it. Why had Camicazi turned on us? Did Alvin offer something she wanted? I mean, I know she wanted to be a dragon and all, but I don't think anyone thought she was really being serious. Besides, Hiccup and I both knew how to turn her into one if she really wanted it. What could she be after? Was it really worth betraying all of us?

I turned back to Stormfly. She was still thinking of fancy methods of killing Alvin, this time, with a mix of swordplay and volleys of spikes. At the very least, she was okay, even with how badly she was hurt.

She then stopped her ranting, turning her gaze back over to me. I jumped back in surprise when I noticed her. "Why do you keep looking at me like that!?" she barked.

"Uh, nothing!" I said. If I told her I was glad she was alright, I had the feeling I knew she would just laugh at me.

Stormfly's expression darkened, dissatisfied with my answer, but she never said anything about it. Instead she started unraveling her bandages.

I went over to her, putting my hands between hers. "Hey, careful!" I said to her.

Sht snarled and gave me a glare. "I'm getting this ridiculous thing off!" she barked. It is amazing how much she actually sounds like her actual self.

"Don't!" I pleaded. "You're hurt! Let it stay on."

"Why should I?" she snarled. "And why do you care?"

We sat there for a silent moment, Stormfly's furious brow looking into my gazeless eyes. I knew exactly why. "Becauseâ€¦ it's my fault," I told her. Her expression didn't change, but I got the feeling that she wanted me to continue. "You're only here because of

me, my mistakes. You never would have got wrapped up with Trader Al or any of this human business if I wasn't around. You'd never have gotten imprisoned by Berk or Alvin. Hey, you'd probably be off getting your first mate and a real name if I wasn't aroundâ€¦"

Stormfly gave me a â€¦ perplexed look, as if she wasn't sure what to think. I don't see how that could have been, especially since ever since I had known her, she had always blame me for alot of things. She was right, if I wasn't around, she'd have been One Eye's favorite student and she'd have been infinitely more deserving of it. The dragon in human form leaned back, dropping her arms to the side, no longer concerned with undoing his bandages. If the silence I took was a few moments, then waiting for Stormfly's reply took a thousand years. Eventually, she groaned, asking, "Soâ€¦ I could die like the rest of the Flight?"

I shook my head vigorously. "No! I mean, of course not! You don't deserve that!"

Stormfly looked at her arm again, but didn't do anything but examine her bandages. "...I think I doâ€¦"

"No you don't!" I denied. "Why would you?" The thought that Stormfly mightâ€¦ No, that was unthinkable.

"Becauseâ€¦" she moaned, painfully. Her eyes scanned everyone in the room, Fishlegs, Meatlug, even me. "I did thisâ€¦ I led us to our deathsâ€¦ I am to blame, not you."

In a time that seemed so far away, I would have patted myself on the back and celebrated upon hearing her say that. I didn't. "Stormfly," I said, approaching her. I gently held onto her right arm, supporting its weight. "You don't deserve to be here. None of us do." Except, maybe me.

She didn't call me a weakling. She didn't even move her arm, taking it away. Instead, she just looked into my eyes. "Toothless," she said glumly. "I owe you an apology."

I blinked, almost wondering if I was in one of those weird dreams my brother or I had. "Forâ€¦ what?" I stammered before recovering enough of myself to actually speak coherently. "It's not your faultâ€¦ any of this happened." No, this was Camicazi's doing; if anyone had a confession to make, it was her.

"No, not that" she groaned.

I blinked, even more confusion hit me. "For what then?"

"For everything else," she said. "I was wrong about you; you're not that badâ€¦" Stormfly gave a little chuckle. "For a human."

If I had to imagine Stormfly's words coming at me like a physical object, then I'd have to imagine an entire house being thrown at me. I remember Camicazi's fist slamming into me right between the eyes knocking me out for maybe a day. Stormfly's words alone should have sent me into next year.

All I could do was look at the red hair girl; she didn't seem as

depressed or in pain now. No, instead she was laughing, smiling. I could only imagine how goofy I looked if it was able to heal broken bone.

I guess it was worth it though; Stormfly was alright.

* * *

><p>The only things I could feel were fear and cold. I had no sight, no sound, not even the sense of where I was. I knew I was stuck in something, but I couldn't tell where or what exactly. Still, I almost felt like I was one place, yet my body was not with me. I knew that couldn't be true, I could feel the dread that gathered in the pits of my heart and burning cold that surrounded me. Even worse than that, I could feel my breaths getting heavier as I slowly ran out of air. Wherever I was, I was beginning to suffocate. Panicked immediately, fearing my life ending if I didn't take steps to save it. I imagined trying to move every part of my body in a random direction, just so I could have a fighting chance.<p>

I wanted to get out, to shout, to break my way from whatever icy prison held me. **"Do not do so, child," **a voice from the middle of no where told me. **"You must endure this to the bitter end."**

But I didn't listen, I was too afraid to die. One moment later, I could feel my forelegs, no, arms again. I imagined myself doing a digging motion and tried to force whatever had trapped me away.

My body started to feel colder, but I did not relent. With a few more handfults, I eventually broke through to surface. My eyes and vision returned abruptly, the light of my escape giving me hope. Forcing myself through, I found myself on a mountainside covered entirely in snow.

A wave of relaxation hit my senses, I was alive, I was not buried under an avalanche after all.

Then the scene shifted. Light became replaced by darkness, soft snow was traded for hardstone; I traded the sight of one mountainside for another, this time with six eyes. The King looked at me, I knew he was upset at me. **"Eldest of Dead Wings, do I need to inform you what you did, wrong, **_**again?"**_

"Sorry!" I gave him a sheepish little grin, knowing that my performance might not have been the best. I mean, really, I just had get myself to suffocate to death while trapped under a dozen feet of snow in an illusion. Simple, right? I mean, I'm sure even the twins would have known what to do there. Yet, even after a dozen or so tries, I still couldn't manage to keep myself still or even remember the whole point of the exercise in the vision.

A gout of flame escaped the King's nostrils; he wasn't pleased. **"Know that both of us have little time available to us; we have deadlines to meet." **

"I know, I know," I managed to say. It was strangely easier to talk to the King after spending a few hours sitting in front of him while he went inside my mind. I guess once I got it in my head that he was always going to be there, always going to be a massive mountain, it didn't seem to matter as much. In fact, I think I was scared more for

the King's verbal reprimands more than his ability to crush me to dust. "May we try again?"

I felt a jab at my side. I saw Astrid giving me a look of annoyance. "I think you've had enough having trying to die in your own imagination," she told me in a matter-of-factly tone of voice.

"I guess we can take a break." I gave her a sheepish smile. Now that I thought about it, I was starting to feel exhausted. I never knew that _thinking _of all things could be so tiring.

"**Then, we will have to continue tomorrow, son of Dead Wings. Your mind is both too weary and too resistant; I cannot assist you in your current state of mind." **said the King, already deciding our session today cut short.

"Right, I guess three hours is enough time spent under a glacier." And yet it was still not enough time to learn anything. I know I asked for his help and all, but I didn't understand why I had to experience being buried alive in an avalanche. I spent hours doing the same thing, over and over again, and I still didn't understand the point of it all, what I had to learn from that experience. At this rate, I didn't know if I could make what I want by Snoggletog.

Astrid nodded, contentedly. "Great, I'm ready to head back home if you are," she told me. "We'll pick up Snotlout and Hookfang and then we'll be on our way."

"Not just yet Astrid," I said before turning back to the King. "Has my Mom come in yet?"

"**Yes, child, your Mother waits secluded in her den, waiting for you. You know the way," **said the King. I didn't know how he was able to know that, but I figure the King must have had some special powers, maybe even one that let him know of things going upon the island.

"Thank you," I said with a bow if only because I wanted to be extra polite. I need the King's favor, or barring that, his support.

Then, with Astrid on my back, I took off from the area reserved for the Flight Commanders for the second time this week. A few nearby dragons gawked at me as I climbed higher, probably surprised that I was able to seemingly come and go so close to the King with such ease and no reprimands or orders to take down; apparently, there was an unspoken rule about getting that close. A few still spoke in hushed tones about Astrid, the fact that she was a 'Herd child' that spoke as Kin did was not lost upon them.

As I exited from the volcano, I circled around the peak before taking dive down at the frosted beach.

There were still some dragons off doing those so called 'mating challenges' but less than yesterday. Apparently, the youngest and the strongest already had their fill and have already moved to the next steps, leaving behind mostly older dragons and a certain male Nightmare who was clearly regretting the decision to join in.

"He's mine!" snapped an older, wrinkled Nightmare. "I saw him first!" She blasted a gout of flame, apparently forgetting everyone was fireproof

"No! I'm stronger!" yelled a yellower one. She was slightly younger looking, but that wasn't saying much. She tackled the wrinkled Nightmare to the ground, apparently not having gone senile yet.

Meanwhile, a third Nightmare tried to crawl away from the older two. His wings were bound up by sea weed and large stones. Apparently, it was one of the weird mating customs dragons had, just to keep the would be suitors from flying off. Well, Snotlout did want to know about how dragons did their mating dances, now he had an up close and personal experience. Even from here, I could easily see Snotlout's panic on his face. He called out to a fourth Nightmare, Hookfang, sitting at the sidelines. "Help me!" It was probably the first time Snotlout did not want to have ladies fighting over him; they were way too old for him.

"My liege, I warned you! I can't otherwise, I'd have to duel youâ€| and then they'll be after _me!"_ said the large dragon, shaking his head.

Unfortunately for Snotlout, the two older Nightmares noticed their 'catch' was escaping. "Hey come back here!" they both said. Each took one of Snotlout's legs and dragged him back, closer to the fighting arena.

I landed by Hookfang, who looked like he had mostly given up at this point. "This could have all been avoided if he didn't eat that boar Tuskmane offered his bride..." he muttered.

"Well, at least Snotlout's learning his lesson about getting involved in love affairs," mused Astrid as she got off. "I could sit here all day!"

"Can you at least make sure that he won't end up being a father?" I asked her. She gave me a look that said she was thinking about it, but in reality I knew she wasn't. "Just do it, I don't think I'm ready to be an uncle just yet..."

Astrid glowered at me. "Fine, but if he tries that thing involving a bird's nest and a pine treeâ€|"

"The initial offering to declare a courtship attempt..." informed Hookfang, lazily having his head down in the sand.

"Whatever!" said Astrid. "If he doesâ€| that to me, Hiccup, I'm not going to save him next time, you hear me?"

I grinned. "Oh, I'm sure he'll never forget, just be sure to remind him every year."

And with that, Astrid went between the two Nightmares. I didn't know if it was against the rules for a human-Nadder-whatever to get involved with the mating rites of another dragon breed, but hopefully, nothing said Astrid would then be forced to wed with Snotloutâ€| I don't think any of us are ready for something like that, even if we were of age by dragon standards.

Then, with that taken care of, I made my way to my Mom made her den.

Despite being a dragon with very good flying capabilities, Mom for some reason took a home that was so close to the ground. Maybe it was the ease of access to fish or servants or maybe she just liked being so close to the sandy beaches. Maybe it had to do with the fact that Toothless was bound to ground for quite a long time and the den never moved since he had taken to the skies. Whatever the case, Mom kept her den by the beaches, a cave that had just enough room for several Night furies to fit in comfortably.

As I approached, I could tell the entrance was clear of any snow or frost, probably blasted away by a jet of flame; that'd certainly explain why the air was slightly burned and warm as I made my way over.

Looking around, I could tell none of the other dragons were close by; all of them were clearly doing their best away to stay away from Mom. I didn't understand why she had a reputation like that, even my own brother was scared of her. For a moment, I thought that maybe, I was wrong and they were right. She could easily destroy me and there was nothing anyone could do to stop her; I would be alone at at her mercyâ€¦ Maybe I should have, picked up As-

No, this was a family matter. Shaking my head, I made a decision. I made my way into the cave. I didn't have to go far to meet a pair of bright oliver green eyes standing in my way. "Hey...Mom." I immediately felt like kicking myself for my stupid choice of words. I know I'm at that awkward teenager phase, but come on, couldn't I think of something better to say to a parent that once thought brainwashing me was a smart idea?

Her green eyes looked at me, as if examining every facet of my being. It was like she wanted to know if I was even really there. "Helloâ€¦sonâ€¦. I wasâ€¦ waiting here for you..." she stammered, as if the words were something she was unfamiliar with using. I guess being awkward with long lost relatives ran in the family. "Where's your brother?" she asked, her tone sounding almost nervous.

"I- Uh, he's fine," I managed to stammer out. At least, I hope he was. I mean, worst case scenario, Alvin took him prisoner and was holding him captive, right? I mean, other than other much less savory fates he could experienceâ€¦ like getting beheaded.

Mom's expression seemed to turn darker, as if she was very unsettled by my word choice. "Why have you come here?" she snapped, almost angrily, almostâ€¦ wearily.

"Toâ€¦ take you homeâ€¦" The moment, I said those words, I suddenly realized there was one very important thing I forgot to consider. What if Mom liked staying under the King's rule? Being a dragon and all that entailed? I could very well be insulting a very ideal she lived for. I didn't cower or run away; instead, I hunched my shoulders forward, making me appear a little more formal, in control. "I mean, I'm here to take you home," I said in a much firmer tone of voice.

Mom seemed to considered my words for a moment, her head tilting

sideways as she examined what I was wearing. Yeah, everyone, human and dragon alike, gave me that look. I mean, just because I wear a saddle as a fashion statement, everyone gave me odd looks. Then she blinked and focused her eyes back on me, the saddle losing her interest. "I..." she tried to say something, but she found it difficult. "I want- I would like thatâ€¦"

My whole world seemed to change in an instant. It was like suddenly, everything was finally going in my direction, after so long of being some sort of cosmic chew toy. I grinned at my Mom, my tail wagging behind me.

"But I can'tâ€¦" she said just as my enthusiasm was at its peak. She then turned her head over and pointed at her back, gesturing to all of her, I think. "Not when like I'm this."

My mood didn't darken in the slightest; the King wouldn't let her go to Berk unless she was human anyways. "I'm already on it, Mom."

She flinched a little at my words; either unsettled by me affectionately calling her my Mom or the fact that I was saying I was planning to breaking spell. "You mean to break the spellâ€¦ Hiccup?" she question.

I nodded. "I've got a plan that I am working on right now. It'll take a while, but I'm thinking I'll be done before the winter is over," I explained to her.

"And then I could go back home so seeâ€¦?"

"Dad," I finished for her. "I never knew what he was like when you were around, but life has been tough without you." Especially since as a single parent, Dad has to juggle the whole being a Viking Chief thing with the Viking dad bit. If Gobber wasn't around, I was sure I'd have ended more dysfunctional that I already was.

Mom turned her head away from me. I think she was feeling guilty and didn't want me to see it. "It has?" she said in a neutral, practiced tone.

I nodded. "Mom, Dad and I, we both want you back," I said.

Mom's head swiveled back, looking at me like some frozen stone idol. For a moment, I thought that maybe my request was falling on deaf ears. "Andâ€¦ your brother?"

"His name's Toothless," I told her. I almost didn't have the heart to tell her that Toothless didn't want her to come over, that was Toothless's opinion, his business, right? Still, looking at Mom's neutral face, I couldn't help but imagine it hid something a little more depressed, more wanting than a Flight Commander. I told her the truth. "Toothless is mad at youâ€¦"

Mom's head bend down, looking at the hard floor of the cave. I was sure if she could cry, a river would be forming right at that spot. "I deserved it, I suppose," she told me. "A Mother never forgets her children and especially the mistakes she makes when raising themâ€¦"

"But you can make up for them!" I shouted. I wanted her to come back

with me; it was selfish, I knew, but I couldn't just let my family remain ruined forever.

Mom wasn't bothering hiding her emotions any more. The moment, I brought up Toothless, her expression changed from that of neutrality to a perpetual gloom. "Even after what I did to you and to your brother?"

"Iâ€¦ I can't speak for Toothless," I admitted. "But I can speak for me and my Dad!"

She turned back at me, her expression staying the same.

"Mom, I forgive you forâ€¦ everything. The having my captured, the brainwashing..." I said.

My Mom's expression turned even more sour, even more depressed and weary looking. She still didn't say anything.

Immediately, I had the feeling I was driving a dagger through my Mom heart with my I was doing more harm than good with my words. I turned myself around, and slowly made my way to the cave entrance. "Look, Mom... I- Just think about if for me, please?" I said just before I stepped outside.

I didn't make it out before I felt a weight pinning my tail to the ground. My Mom's right paw was all she needed to hold me here. "Why do you do want to do this?" she asked me.

"Soâ€¦ we could be a family again," I said. "A complete family; you, Dad, me and Toothlessâ€¦"

Mom let her paw off my tailfin, but I didn't leave, I still had something I needed to say.

"Toothless, is still mad at you forâ€¦ everything," I admitted. I mean, it's probably easier for me to forgive our Mom because I went through only a few days worth ofâ€¦ issues. A whole life time like what my brother had, that was something else entirely. "But I'm thinking, maybe if you were around, at home, he might forgive you, see you as our Mom againâ€¦"

Mom stayed silent, deep in thought.

Having said what I came here to say, I decided to make my way out another time. But instead of Mom holding on to my tail to keep me from leaving, her words stopped me in place. "Does my youngest- Does Toothless still like oysters?" Mom asked, a simple innocuous little question.

"Toothless likes them best when fried," I said with a smile.

* * *

><p>Thank you to Thorborn for helping create Alvin's text. Accented speech is not my thing. His speech is heavily accented to help him stand out.

**While I know I could have portrayed what happened last night between Alvin and Stormflyâ€¦ I think it would have been a little

extreme, you can guess by Alvin's dialogue. **

As for Camicazi... you're going to need to wait for a little bit longer for me to explain everything. You know, I wonder how many people wrote about a situation where she backstabs the others?

And yeah, I finally did it. A slow start getting mother and son back together, at least just a little. Val obviously has... issues.

17. Chapter 17

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

**Another relatively early chapter. I'm getting some tempo at posting, it seems. **

Enjoy and comment.

* * *

><p>It's been three days since we visiting the King, but I still couldn't get used to it. I didn't like coming down here with Hiccup, but I couldn't exactly leave him behindâ€| Plus, I didn't exactly feel like staying on Berk either, not with everyone giving me odd looks at my new tail every now and again. Yet, every time I got on the Chief's son and rode off to this island no Viking has ever gone to, it was always equally unsettling amounts of awkwardness and frightening experiences.<p>

It was awkward, because while I was still mostly human, the only parts of me that said otherwise were all not easy to conceal. I can talk to dragons and they always gave me a look of bewilderment, like they were having a hard time _comprehending _that I spoke to themâ€| Hopefully, that'd get easier once we start having more in common...

But as for frightening? I didn't even need to do more than raise my head and look to my left. Hiccup stood a stone's throw away from me, yet at the same time, he wasn't really here. Yes, his body sat right where I saw it was, but the boy I had come to know was no where in sight. Like a statue of himself, the Night Fury didn't move, didn't breathe. No, he was off somewhere else, in experiencing the visions the King kept feeding him.

Turning to my right, I saw the massive dragon, his eyes focused intently on Hiccup. I didn't know the full extent of what he was doing to my friend, but I really hope he wasn't messing with Hiccup's head again. I wasn't scared of him crushing me like an ant; in fact, I was strangely, confident he wouldn't, not so long as I held the rules in place. But for Hiccup? Just thinking about what the King could do to his mind made me feel like I was a little girl losing her uncle for the second time. **"Fear not, little Kin," **said the massive dragon, clearly addressing me since he lacked any one else to tale to. **"Dead Wing's eldest shall be unharmed."**

"Hey!" I snapped, bringing my hands up to my head as if I wanted to

shake off an infestation of bugs. "I thought I told you, noâ€¦ doing that!" I hated the idea of having a magically powerful, demigod-like dragon knowing what I was thinking, but there wasn't exactly much I could do other than ask him not to peer into my thoughts. So far, he kept his wordâ€¦ hopefully.

The King gave a laugh, amused, **"Truly you wound me, young Nadder. Do you really think I need such power to be able to predict the mind of a fledgeling Kindred?"**

"I'm not _one of your Kin!" _I grumbled. Here we go, _again_. So, not only did I have to deal with awkward and frightening moments, I had to put up with annoying ones as well. Honestly, for a dragon who claims to be so high and mighty, was he really so willing to stoop down to teasing so easily?

"Oh, but you are," said the massive dragon. **"Don't tell me you have forgotten about our pact?"**

It might have not been the smartest idea I ever had, but I glowered at the King. Did he really have to remind me? For that, I only needed a mirror, not a talking mountain with teeth. The only reason I had a tail and feet that were too big for boots were because I needed his help to save Hiccup, terms by which he set for some arcane reason. "That doesn't make usâ€¦ Kin," I told. "I just took the potion, nothing more.

"Ah, but you are," said the King. **"It has been an age since a lesser being has been suffused by ichor, uplifted into something greater, as one of our Kin. Now, in this age, it seems that Fate conspires to make such things happen more frequent than they had in generations."**

As soon as he said the word 'ichor', understanding of that word dawned upon me. There was no real translation for it in Norse, but I suddenly knew it meantâ€¦ the blood of a god. And the King clearly meant that this also meant the blood of a dragon. His words bothered me more than it should have. The idea that there was a time when people were 'uplifted' into dragons or that dragons were worshipped as gods seemed so alien, so distant from the dragons-are-trophies-or-pests upbringing I had. I didn't say anything.

Turning back at Hiccup, I saw he was still in a trance, still gazing off into nowhere with blank eyes. I hoped it would be over soon, just so I can get away from the King and hisâ€¦ unsettling words. I really wish the King would be trapped in Hiccup's vision as well, but the King could apparently hold a conversation and a mental torture session at the same time.

If the King kept giving me that pleased grin over and over again, I felt like I would die of embarrassment. **"Come now, child. You should be proud of what you will soon become. I can already picture what you will become, can you?"**

As soon as he said those words, I felt myself changing. I was changing, but it didn't feel painful. Pink skin turned into dark blue scales, a deeper shade than the skyblue of Stormfly's scales. Suddenly, it became difficult to call my armsâ€¦ arms, as bright golden leathery membranes spread out from them; all the while, my

hands lost functionality, becoming nothing more than stubby claws. Spikes pierced my head, replacing my falling golden locksâ€¦ My legs grew bulkier, comfortably suiting my taloned feet. I felt my spine twist and writhe, forcing me to lean forward until it became perpendicular to my legs. I suddenly became aware of how large I was, enough that I was sure that I could carry fully grown men if I wanted to.

Perhaps the one thing stranger than my sudden transformation was what I felt about it. I didn't feelâ€¦ odd, mismatched anymore. As much as I wanted to deny it, I couldn't say I was all too happy slowly changing every time I so much as got a blister or a bruise. Now, I was perfectly normal Nadderâ€¦ and the worst part was, Iâ€¦ didn't mind it. I should have been scared, I should have been worried; yet, I wasn't.

"**Truly, your old name suited you." **said the King, as if he was discussing about changing it. "**Then, as well as now, you are truly beautiful." **

As I listened to the King's words, I couldn't help but _know_ how right he was. I was beautiful as one of the Herdâ€¦ and so I was now. I tried shunning him away, turning my head away from the great dragon. I wanted to tell him to shout, but my mouth would not move.

"**But maybe you will need a more fitting nameâ€¦ simply calling you 'beautiful' all the time will not do..." **suggested the King.

"I don't need a new name," I managed to say, but at the same I didn't feel so sure of myself.

"**Why not?" **said the large dragon, amused. "**You could be name Bright-yet-Enduring, a spark that does more than flicker for a moment or perhaps Fear Rended** **That last one will suit you nicely, once you avenge your poor old uncle, even though he was of the Herd.**"

A vision came to me, one in the not too distant future. I saw myself, as I was right now, battling it out in the skies against a dragon that glowed like some sort of brightly lit spectre, the Nightmare I had the upper hand, my ability to fly granting me speed and agility I had once only dreamed of. Victory was assured, a moment of glory I had been waiting for since I was a child was going to be achieved!

Immediately, I tried forcing that vision away. "I thought I told you not to look through my mind!" I barked.

"**Not yours. It is simply the observations of Dead Wing's eldest, I have gleaned from him those months ago." **said the King. "**It is surprising how much he devotes to understanding you, for such obscure details are not normally known to me.**"

Turning back to Hiccup, I couldn't help but feel a little frightened to know that the King was able to use him to understand me. At the same time, I couldn't help but feel a little endeared to know there was someone who actually knew _why_ I fought and trained as hard as I have. Just as well, I should be there for him, not getting distracted by the promises of some dragon. "I'll do that myself thank you!" I said.

The King widened his mouth into a toothy grin. ****"As you wish, my little Kin, as you desire." ****

And then the world became blurry, fading into incoherent sight.

Blinking, I found myself back into my humanâ€¦ well, mostly human form. I was relieved to know that the King did not really force me to turn into a Nadder. Even better, if what the King said was true, I might not even have to turn into one after all. If Hiccup's plan were to work, then I could stop it before it even began. Strangely, I was saddened by that thought; I did look veryâ€¦ beautiful.

Shaking my head from that thought, I glared at King, resolving that I should ask him not to let me see visions like that again. It was bad enough keeping my body from changing any more than it needed to, but adding my mind on top of that was just too much.

The King still gave me looks that felt like they would kill me. I glare, a snarl, even an angry sneer; those, I could stand. A gleeful smile from that face__**? **_I just couldn't stand it.

"Can we stopâ€¦ talking, like right now?" I asked of him. I know this was the kind action that should get me killed if he was like some Viking Chiefs I knew about, but I think I was fed up of him. I really had better things to do than to talk to a mountain with teeth.

****I suppose we canâ€¦"** said the King, as if that was the easiest thing in the world. ****"There are other Kin who wish to see you; I will allow them an audience."****

"You mean Hiccup's mom? Is she coming to see him?" I asked. I haven't seen her since I made that deal with the King a few months back and I had no idea what to expect of her for saving her oldest son. I also had no idea of meeting her againâ€¦ not while she still burn me to cinders.

****Yes, Flight Commander Dead Wings is among those who are comingâ€¦** but no, she is not coming for her son."******

I blinked. I mean, I was expecting dragons to go come after Hiccup, especially since he was a Night Fury. That more or less automatically set him apart, a cut above the rest. But to have dragons, even Hiccup's mom, just to see me? That was unexpected. "Sure, let them come aheadâ€¦" I said. Maybe they're here to see the kind of freak I wasâ€¦ a Herd that speaks like Kin. How ugly...

****Very well,"** said the King. ****They come now."****

Soon, I saw the shapes of dragons descend on me and land on the stone platform I stood upon.

Immediately, I could tell Hiccup's mother apart from the rest. I mean, it's not like there were any other Night Furies I knew about. Beside her were several other dragons, I couple of them I recalled seeing other day, Hiccup's so called servants. As for the rest, I drew a blank, their scales and patterns all looked familiar, yet I couldn't tell why.

They all turned and bowed to the King, respectful and honored. "My Lord," they all said in unison, though I could tell the other dragons were a little more eager to see the King.

The King in turn greeted them, **"My Kin, it is good that many of you have come. Though, normally allowing those of lesser station would not be permissible at these depths; however, with the death of a Flight and of one of my most prized Knights, it is necessary to begin the rebuilding process. Know that there are vacancy and that many of those who stand here have the potential to be worthy Knights. In point of fact, there is one among you who may become your leader, the new Flight Commander. Now, do any of have anything to say?"

**

"T-thank you!" stammered one head of a Zippleback.

"We won't let you down!" said the other head.

They began all speaking in turn, giving their shouts of approval. While I know the King said they were here to see me, it was clear that he had somethings to say to our little guests.

Hiccup's mom stayed mostly silent. She clearly didn't care so much about it. Instead, I saw her looking at me from the corner of her eyes, focusing on me intently with those catlike eyes. That set of some warning going through my head. If she took me on here and now, there was little I could do to stop her, not even get away. At best, I could delay the inevitable. And then, I heard a whisper escape her lips. "You'reâ€¦| _her _aren't you?"

'Her_' _as in, a girl, not necessarily a person, though it can mean that. I was just someone, a random girl that decided to offer up her humanity to spare her son from a terrible mistake, some girl that her oldest son had a crush on, some random girl that was willing to fight her to take back her son... She didn't know who I was, I doubted she even knew my name; the only things I believe she'd know about me are what I have done in relation to her son.

I nodded, if only to be polite. Last time, she kinda had me pinned to the beach to eat sand and read out her old name, I didn't want a repeat of that happening if I could help it. "My name isâ€¦| sort of like 'beautiful one' but not asâ€¦| our Kin say it," I whispered back.

In response, she scrawled some runes onto the floor. 'ASTRID' she spelled out. I gave her a nod, understanding. At least even with all of the weird translating of dragon words and back, we could at least communicate. "Then, you know mineâ€¦| both of my names, Herd and Kin," said the Night Fury.

I nodded again. "I'mâ€¦| sorry about last time," I said, truthfully. I know I managed to save Hiccup, but I think we'd both have liked things better with less life and death situations and less bargains with giants.

Then dragon, no, Valhallarama's eyes softened, becoming more like round balls rather than catlike slits. Maybe it had to do with my politeness. "As am Iâ€¦| child," she said. She then turned to look at Hiccup, still frozen as a statue.

"He's fine, I've been keeping watch." I said. At least, I hope I was being honest. He's been stuck like that forâ€¦ hours now, the longest he's ever been. If the King noticed our little discussion, the King didn't so much as move. Instead, he seemed preoccupied with telling the other dragons their future duties. Or maybe that was simply a ruse, like he wanted to give Val and I a way talk, even with all these dragons around us.

The Night Fury seemed relieved about that. "Then, I am glad that my son has such worthwhile friendsâ€¦ it is no wonder that he spent so much time trying to chase after you..."

"Him and everyone else," I groaned.

Valka almost choked on a laugh. "Reminds me of my youth, then. I eventually had to narrow it down to do suitors, and my did they fight for me..." she said with pride.

I couldn't help but feeling my own sense of accomplishment. I mean, here was Valhallarama, one of the greatest Viking heroes of our time and one of the few who were women. If there were people who set the bar for pride, glory, that sort of thing, that was her. "You knowâ€¦ I'll admit, back when I was a kid, I looked up to you and all, since you were a fame adventurer who..."

Val gave me a melancholy look, equal parts grin and frown. "Slew many foesâ€¦" she didn't need to say who or what they were. I heard her travels took her all over the sea, letting her battle her way through Romans, Frenchmen, Celts, other Vikings, dragons that probably weren't even in the Book of Dragons, and other stranger things. "I will admit, I sometimes long for those days, back when I gave a little less thought on my enemiesâ€¦"

She was obviously talking about the wholeâ€¦ mess that she got herself tied up in. She had become a dragon and had been more or less forced to go up against her old home. Even assuming she didn't directly kill anyone every time she destroyed a siege tower, she was still allowing people she once knew to come to harmâ€¦ including potentially her own husband and child. And that's just the human side. How many dragons did she fight in the past that were related to those who serve under her now? "We don't have to be enemiesâ€¦" I said. "I stillâ€¦ kinda look up to you."

"Do you, now?" she said, her tone stiff and flat.

"Wellâ€¦ you're pretty good," I said. "I didn't stand a chance last time I came over; I doubt I could even now."

Valka gave a snort. "Wellâ€¦ I have been keeping my skills sharpâ€¦ though, I doubt any instructor would ever teach you to take down a Night Fury... say, is my husband's old friend still teaching that class he did every now and again?"

"I'm glad I got to skip himâ€¦" I said, with satisfaction. "Turns out I didn't need his lessonsâ€¦"

If the King's smiles made me feel like I could die from embarrassment, then I think Valhallarama's could probably be all that's keeping me alive right now. I liked having her approval.

Meanwhile, we tuned in in time to find the King giving the closing statements to the other dragons. **"...Now then, my Kin, if you understand your duties from henceforth, I will release you to conclude your business with the budding Nadder. Flight Commander Dead Wings, is your business with her concluded?"**

Valhalla No, Dead Wings stepped forward and bowed; I don't know why, but the name seemed to make sense to me. I guess maybe it was because she was a dragon, I don't know. "Yes, my Lord."

"Then, I will ask you to stay and watch over your eldest, allowing the Nadder to receive her message."

Dead Wings nodded and went over to Hiccup. If there was anything I was sure of this day, I knew she would be watching over him to her last breath. Surtr, the great giant of fire that would ravage world himself, would need to face her before even thinking of harming Hiccup.

"Now then, you may deliver your message" said the King.

The dragons, maybe over a dozen in all gathered around me in a circle, giving me eager looks. "Is this really her?" said one I didn't recognize.

"Yes," said another. "The scent is as I remember, as is most of her." Whoever these dragons were, they clearly knew of me. If only I could remember where I saw them.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Do you not recognize me?" said a Nadder.

"Nor I?" asked a Gronckle.

I shook my head. I drew up a blank. They were familiar, yet I could not recall how.

"What do you expect, for one of them?" said one of the dragons that served Hiccup.

I didn't need to do much more than glare to send him reeling. "Hey, remember what your liege says," I remind him. Some servant he was! "What are you even doing here anyways?" I mean, I got why the others were here. They were here to see me for reasons I couldn't understand, but most of the dragons that served Hiccup weren't so keen on me.

"Hmph, these Kin are mad," sneered the dragon. "They claim to have heard of you and simply sought you out."

"Okay. So why?" I asked the other dragons.

"You truly do not remember?" asked the Gronckle.

I shook my head. "Remind me then."

The Nadder and Gronckle both looked at each other, as if silently coming to a conclusion.

"You set us free" said the Nadder.

"And asked us not to take our revenge on the Herd..." added the Gronckle.

Faintly, it felt like light was dawning in my mind. These dragons, the Gronckle, the Nadder, and the others behind them, they all suddenly looked familiar. I remember way back when I first lost my ability to speak Norse I set these dragons free, in exchange for not helping Alvin. I guess with the dragon nest so close to Berk, I think they decided to go back to serving to the King.

I nodded, understanding, at last. "Right, now I remember you were quite quick on turning your back on your King last time we met. What made you decide to serve him again after 'abandoning' you?"

The Nadder said reluctantly. "Well, better to have one protector than none at all even though there was a price to be paid."

The assembled dragons all gave nods and confirmations of agreement. That made sense, then. I guess if I was a scared dragon like they were running away from being held captive, I'd go do what I can do get in the good graces of whoever I thought would best cover for me. In fact, I think quite a lot of Vikings lived that way, too.

"So why come after me?" As soon as I said those words, the dragons all took a step back, as if unsure of what to do.

The dragon that served Hiccup gave a look of vindictive satisfaction. "The King has set a price and they must agree to it to warrant his protection. Still, I suppose this makes sense, their worth is not much after all.

Then, the assembled dragons all took a deep bow, all of them clearly not liking the idea. I didn't either; I was the one who they were bowing to. "My Lady, what do you command?"

* * *

><p>I think it's been five days now since we were stabbed in the back, five days since my own desire for revenge was turned against me. That gave me plenty of time, time to sit and think.<p>

And with that time, I have decided I hate prison as much as a certain Bog Burglar. Camicazi, that traitor, used to tell me it's the most fun thing in the world, since it tells you how seriously people take you. The better you did, the smaller and tighter your cage. I wasn't like that back stabbing, honorless, no good thief! I hated thinking of her with a passion. It was her fault I was confined to this small space, forced to share it with Meatlug, Fishlegs, and worst of all, him...It was her fault that my arm was wrapped in thick bandages, the injuries I had taken because she tipped off Alvin. It was she who got me stuck in these moldy old garments that might have been old was rags.

But this jail cell in itself? I hated it just as much. These conditions were just unlivable, hellish. For a place that was apparently freshly new, it was all so filthy. There was no room for privacy, even when we needed to relieve ourselves. I couldn't assume

my true form or else, I could crush someone and I doubted it would have made any difference at all. Worst of all, these moldy garments had plenty of holes in them, leaving me to experience the bitter winter cold as humans did.

"Howâ€¦Doâ€¦ Youâ€¦ Peopleâ€¦ Standâ€¦This...COLD?" I managed to say between shivers.. If the room was just a little bit larger, I could have dawned on my true shape. I didn't care if my body was recovering from my wounds, I just wanted to stop feeling like I was going to freeze.

"You used to it.I did," said Toothless, a slight blush on his face as if he was embarrassed. "It's not that bad."

"Yeah, it's notâ€¦ too badâ€¦" Meatlug shivered, but nowhere near as badly as I had. She was lucky, she not only kept clothes, but I imagine that beingâ€¦ larger might have also helped to keep her a little warmer.

She also had another advantage, the blonde haired boy that would never leave her side. "The dark's worse," said Fishlegs, keeping his hand clasped around Meatlug's.

"Well... you don't haveâ€¦to be..." replied Meatlug. Ever since the two woke up the other day, they more or less decided to stick close together. They sat to the very back of our room, sharing it between the two of them; neither of them seemed to mind. I think most everyone on Berk knew why, though I doubt they themselves knew. No, I shouldn't dwell on others too much, I had something I needed to do, something to accomplish.

"Iâ€¦Am...Stillâ€¦Coldâ€¦" I shivered, reminding everyone in the cell that I was stuck in these old clothes. Really, Alvin breaking my arm was mostly a pragmatic move, but letting me stick to these rotted clothes in the Winter was the definition of cruel. It wasn't so bad the past few days, but today had been the worst.

"How bad is it?" I was somewhat surprised to find Toothless was the one to ask that question. Then again, ever since he came back from his trip from those Meatheads, he's been acting odd around me. Maybe it was a bad idea to say he was more than an entitled childâ€¦

"BADâ€¦" was all I needed to say. Honestly, how could the Viking stand winter without insulating scales, it seemed almost unbelievable.

"Alright," said Toothless. Then, the boy stood up and slipped off his cloak. As he leaned forward heâ€¦ presented it to me. "Here, take this?"

My shivering slightly abated, replaced by another feeling. Was itâ€¦ concern? "Butâ€¦ What about you?" Another time, I would have accepted the boys offering of his cloak with a sort of malicious satisfaction, as if I deserved it more than he did. Alternatively, I would have just slapped it out of his hands, claiming myself to be aboveâ€¦ Now, I was turning it down, not out of scorn, but because I was worried he might get cold instead; even after how much I have been complaining about freezing! What was wrong with me?

"It's fine!" he said, his voice quavering slightly. "I said the cold wasn't that badâ€¦"

Almost begrudgingly, I nodded, accepting of hisâ€¦ gift. I shouldn't turn it down, I needed it, right?

Then, he placed his black fur coat over me like a blanket. "How's it feel, Stormfly?"

"Better now," I wasn't shivering as badly as I had been. Immediately, I felt warmer, the cold air no longer reaching my torso as easily as it had.

Toothless gave me a grin, pleased with him. "Good," he said, a slight shiver in his tone.

Maybe my trust in him is not misplaced, there had to beâ€¦ more to him than I realized. I just hope that giving me his fur coat was not going to make himâ€¦ I shook my head, no, don't think about that. The cold was unbearable, I didn't need to give it backâ€¦ at least, not right now.

Then, I heard heavy footsteps approach, sending a different wave of fear bursting into my mind. The four of us all turned in time to see three brutish men standing by the outside of our cell. "It's time!" barked one who had a beard that reached all the way to the floor.

Toothless gave them all a look of annoyance, but stood to meet them. "Yeah, yeah, yeah; that time again..." he sneered. Everyday at around noon, Alvin would send his men to fetch Toothless to work on the tasks he desired. What tasks he were given were unknown to me, but I doubted any of my education, Kin or human, would have helped me there.

The long bearded man brandished a sword, ready to chop off the hands of anyone who tried anything. Another man, this time, one with a short beard and a tattooed face held out a key and began unlocking the cage.

"You'll beâ€¦ safe, right?" I asked Toothless. We've done this routine maybeâ€¦ three times before, but this time, I couldn't help but worry. Why was I suddenly so concerned over his well being?

"I willâ€¦" said Toothless. He didn't sound all too confident, but I wanted to believe him. "I'm too valuable to Alvin to loseâ€¦" He stepped out of the cage as soon as it was opened. The Outcast warriors gave bloodthirsty look at him, as if waiting him to make the wrong move.

I nodded, suppressing a sniffle before it could escape my lips. "Good luck, Toothless," I said.

And then he was gone.

I sat here for who knows how long, hoping that for once I could see Toothless's face again. I worried I would never be able to give back his coat or that maybe Alvin had plans to do with him. It was a new low for me, to worry about him, but I didn't care. It gave me something to think about other than my rage at Camicazi, that

traitor. It also allowed me to focus on my surroundings more than my anger allowed me to.

All the while, Meatlug and Fishlegs were off discussing things with each other, passing the time with random trivia about equally random topics. They kept mostly to themselves, whispering in the back; though, sometimes, like earlier when Toothless was offering me his coat or when the Outcasts came to fetch them, they mostly stayed silent.

Now though that changed a little. "Sayâ€¦ uh Stormfly, got a moment to talk?" I heard Meatlug say to me. The only of my Kindred to stay behind.

"I have nothing but time," I replied. It's been hours maybe since Toothless had left and now I was just sick of worrying, sick of waiting. I wanted to get my mind off him for a while. "What is it?"

"Rightâ€¦" muttered Fishlegs. "It's about Toothlessâ€¦"

He seemed cautious, leery; he had good reason, I glowered the moment he said his name. Just when I was planning to avoid thinking about him, the next conversation I'd have would be about him. Still, maybe it'd be better than moping over whether or not he'd be back in time for dinner. "What about him?" I moaned.

"Weâ€¦ thinkâ€¦" Meatlug stammered out, as if the words she were trying to say were a little difficult to say.

"Toothless has been actingâ€¦ odd.."

"Oh, so you noticed?" I quipped. There, things weren't that bad afterall. I think things were about to get a little brighter in our dank little alcove. I mean, I didn't have to think about you-know-who doing you-know-what. I could instead imagine him giving those goofy looks of his whenever he saw me.

"Yeah," said Fishlegs. "But have you thought of why?" he asked.

I frowned. Now that I thought about itâ€¦ why had Toothless given me his coat? Why did he give me that goofy grin of his, like he was nervous every time he saw me? Unless, wait, no that was crazy, unthinkable. Yes, it was that time of year, but he was human, not of my Kinâ€¦ except I was not either. "Noâ€¦ why?" I lied.

Meatlug answered with my worst fears. "We think he might have a crush on youâ€¦"

Those opened up all sorts ofâ€¦ possibilities, both frightening and strangely alluring. The idea that Toothless, someone who came from a completely different world, both status wise as well as bodily, could develop affections for me wasâ€¦ I didn't know what to think. I mean, sure, he and I were quite natural enemies, but these daysâ€¦ these days were different.

At the same time, I wonderedâ€¦ if maybe I was develop feelings of my own as well. It was idiotic, foolish for me. I mean, even if he was really Kin, we were completely different Breeds, nothing good could come from such a relationship. There were reason that sort of thing

was frowned up in society. Except, I don't think humans had such restrictionsâ€¦ Camicazi's question a long time ago, wondering if I would take _Toothless _for a mate if I ever was bound to human form rang in my ears.

I shoved those thoughts away, focusing instead on the ones who brought them up. "You mean like the two of you?" I snapped.

"Well, I-" Fishlegs mumbled.

"And I wasâ€¦" Meatlug tried to say.

They backed up from each other, quickly letting go of the other's hand for the first time in hours. Fishlegs and Meatlug both looked at each other with blushes that made them look like oversized berries. The two of them were clearly embarrassed, unable to do or say anything to the other, not even look the other in the eye.

If I was crueller, I would I smirked with a little bit of satisfaction and a little bit of pride. I deftly turned the conversation back on itself, making myself no longer the subject and instead confusing those who pestered me.

Instead, I found myself looking at the Fishlegs and Meatlug, unable to actually say anything and too helpless to do anything else. I wondered if maybe I was a little too harsh doing that to my friends. I mean, it was their business, not mineâ€¦ I shouldn't have butted in. At the same time, I wondered if maybe, by looking at them, I was looking at myself, sometime in the not too distant future. Would I be like them, unable to spit out something, because I didn't want to accept it?

My musings were interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps, the Outcasts were making their way back. It must have been time for Toothless to return and now I was unsure if I wanted him back. I just find it unnerving to think that that not only was Toothlessâ€¦ interested in me, but thatâ€¦ No, I'm not going to think about it, I'm not even going to bother. He was beneath me or above me, from a completely different kind of being, even if he was Kin. I shouldn't dwell on those things. I shouldn't let my...this human body decide for me on whether or not I took a mate. I needed some sort of test, some sort of challenge to set the bar, to prove the worth of any prospects!

As Toothless approached, dragged along by the same three guards from earlier, I made a resolution. I was not going to get distracted; we needed a way out, who cares if he had a crush on me?

The guards opened the door to our cell and shoved Toothless in so hard he fell to the ground. He didn't say anything, he didn't even grunt. The guards left, apparently bored of a prisoner who wouldn't talk back.

And then, Toothless gave me that goofy grin on his faceâ€¦ and I was suddenly unsure of myself.

* * *

><p>This chapter is for the girls, hopefully, I handled things well. Yes, more shipping stuff and more hints, but don't

worry, next is when thingsâ€¦ escalate. Let's just leave it at that.

18. Chapter 18

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****So, enough background for, I think it's time to finally ramp things up.****

****Interestingly enough, I keep having either shorter posting cycles or posting longer on average chapters than when I started out. Dunno why. Well, it means more story for you guys.****

****Please enjoy and leave a comment.****

* * *

><p>"Soâ€¦ how have you been?" My Dad said before he took a spoonful of oatmeal into his mouth, his face pensive as if was really asking a different question; we both knew he was, but that didn't make directly asking it up front any easier. I've been closer to my own father for the first time sinceâ€¦ ever and yet we still can't get through breakfast without feeling awkward about it.<p>

My eyes rolled; we already knew where this conversation was going, it's been the same exact questions every morning ever since Toothless left. I took one of my paws and began writing imaginary runes in the air, a trick I picked up because I didn't have access to wood, stone, or dirt all the time. For the most part, it worked. 'I AM FINE,' I quickly wrote in the air.

"Oh, really?" my Dad said with a somewhat feigned curiosity, just exactly as it has been for the past few days. "You've been off with that Hofferson girl everyday for just over a week nowâ€¦" he said, pretending he didn't know Astrid's name and that I haven't been taking Snotlout or Hookfang along for the ride.

'DAD,' I wrote, pretending to underline my imagined wordsâ€¦ not that it did any good. I hated talking about this, mostly because this made me feel queasy, uneasy.

See, the thing was, because I never told my Dad about the exact nature of myâ€¦ disappearances for the past week, he came up with own ideas about what we did. And well, none of them involved having my head probed open by a gargantuan dragon that could sink armadas just by wading into the sea or visiting Mom as a Night Fury who was a lieutenant of said dragon. Instead, his head came up with an idea that was equally unreal. "Oh, I'm just wondering if you two wereâ€¦ hanging out?"

I rolled my eyes, yet again. Dad thought Astrid and I were dating, as if I could ever have a chance with her while I was over dozen times her size. Then again, weirder things have happenedâ€¦ and I might be able to solve that problem, if all goes well today. 'DAD,' I wrote and underlined, again.

"I mean, you two have been leaving Berk for a week now, people have

these crazy ideas that you might be holding hands on a beach" And by people with crazy ideas, my Dad meant himself. I guess I had to get my ability to make crazy or unreal assumptions from somewhere, didn't I?

I took a bite of my salmon and wished that I didn't have to hide from my Dad. If he knew where I was...what happened to Mom, things would only end in disaster. I mean, we've told him near nothing about the King or the Flights, he'd think he can pick a fight with the dragons and win but then again, maybe if I told him, would he still be willing to rush out? I swallowed the rest of my breakfast and gave Dad a look.

"What? I mean, that's what other people say!" he countered. "And it's not like every boy your age hasn't been after her for, well since ever"

Well, he was technically right, but as soon Astrid's started changing, people have been giving her the sort of looks that I used to get. Me? I was a dragon who used to be a boy, that was normal compared to what Astrid is going through now. And I didn't want to think about that; I had more important things to do. I got up and walked away from the table. 'I'M GOING.' I quickly wrote.

Dad simply gave a shrug, resigned to not knowing, at least for now. "Come back by dinner," he said resigned.

And then I stepped away from the table, thinking that I was ready to face the day. I wasn't. Instead, I knocked it over, spilling everything, oatmeal, fishbones, and bread. Great, Hiccup, just when you think you're trying to be level headed and collected you make an idiot out of yourself for the third time today.

"I'll get that," Dad said awkwardly as he began picking up wooden plates and utensils.

I gave him a sheepish grin as I stepped outside the door, mostly glad that Dad was still willing to put up with the nuances of having a dragon for a son. On the one hand, being a dragon has not really changed me all that much, I was still the same old klutz I always was; I was just bigger and tended to set things on fire slightly more often, _slightly._

As soon as I was outside, I quickly took off, flying to the docks in no time at all.

The harbor was not used much these days. A few weeks back, I had organized many of those who were otherwise unemployed, human and dragon alike, into a team to break and move the ice to allow ships to move in and out with ease in time they would otherwise be stuck. That didn't happen anymore, Winter's grip on the sea was now firm. Ice and frost built up, covering the docks in a frozen, almost flat sea at least a foot thick.

Few used the harbor now at least as a harbor. As it turns out, a frozen port was a great place to hang out and socialize. On the ice, there were plenty of people, humans and dragons doing what we Vikings called 'Winter sports', the kinds of things that can only be done when it's cold enough to freeze spit. Mostly they were kids, playing a modified version of Bashyball that was oddly less violent than

usual. It was kind of in the rules to hit people with a hard and heavy leather ball...so typically kids lost several baby teeth playing the game. Several others, mostly adults and some dragons, gathered around the kids, making sure they were perfectly safe.

Among them were Hookfang and Snotlout. They sat at one of the frozen over piers, looking at the spectacle as it was beginning to unfold.

"Make that play!" shouted Snotlout the Monstrous Nightmare to a bunch of kids who barely understood him even when he spoke Norse. "No, that's a foul! No, were you watching the same game as us, Ref?" Snotlout loved sporting events, mostly because he took first place in all of the ones he competed in. I disliked them for very similar reasons.

As I got closer, Hookfang took notice at me and then promptly got up. "Is it time?"

"In a minute," I replied, mostly just to give Snotlout a little more time to watch the game. This time, it was a little more important to him than any ordinary Bashyball game. Besides, Astrid still hadn't showed up.

Out in the distance, I could see the kids playing Bashyball having the time of their lives. They skidded across the ice, throwing and dodging the ball in chaotic frenzy, trying to land a hit on the other players. One of them managed to score a what he proclaimed a "combo" taking out five of his peers with a fancy ricochet. It's a very violent and hectic game, the kind that I never really liked, but wished I did as a kid.

Although, one of kids had the clever idea to use wings. Gustav, well, the dragon formerly known as Gustav, lunged in, using his wings to fly above the play area. He swooped in and caught the ball with his feet, saving one of his teammates from being taken out.

"Hey! No fair!" cried one of the kids as Gustav flew over them. That kid promptly received a throw in retaliation from the Nightmare.

And then, suddenly the whole game seemed to change entirely. Now it seemed everyone wanted a piece of the young Nightmare. Teams practically dissolved, as suddenly it became a race to see who could hit Gustav first.

"Hey! Let's hunt a dragon!" said one boy.

"Yeah!" agreed a few others.

"You'll never catch me!" yelled Gustav flying just overhead, but never so far away from the others that they didn't have a chance. No, that would have been boring for everyone involved, especially him.

"Yeah!" cried Snotlout, enjoying the game. "Nightmares are the best, kid!"

The whole scene filled me with a little bit of laughter. It seemed so easy for the kids to just accept a dragon into their midst, to take

it for granted like it was just an everyday fact of life. Sure by now, most people on Berk have gotten used to the idea that someone they know is now several times larger or smaller and has wings, but most people still aren't comfortable about it. There was still unrest, rumors about the curse spreading, and other unsavory things. To the grownups, it was a disease, an affliction.

To the kids, it was cool, it was exciting. They did not have any malice or any pity for Gustav, if anything, they had very obvious envy. Even from this distance, I could hear a few of them wishing they could fly up there, just to take on Gustav in the skies he had to himself. And to tell the truth, they were right, being a dragon was not completely bad, it had its ups and downs. I was still me

I spent a few more minutes admiring the scene. Snotlout was still cheering Gustav on and Hookfang kept waiting patiently.

It was at this time my ears picked up on a faint crunching noise as someone approached us on the dock. I turned in time to see Astrid coming. Excitedly, almost like I was some sort of dog, I slammed my tail into the dock repeatedly. "Hey, Astrid!" I greeted her.

She stopped and blinked, her eyes staring into me, but not at me. That was all she did.

I called out again, this time a little worried there was something wrong. "Astrid?"

She blinked again. I was a little worried for a moment, mostly because that kind of seemed a little odd. I mean, it just seemed like it was taking her a moment to process her own name.

Snotlout had even less dignity and pride than I had, if that was even possible; he knocked over a crate the moment I called Astrid by her name. "Hey babe!" he flashed her a grin.

That seemed to call Astrid back to her senses. She slammed a fist into Snotlout's face. "Ugh, I told you not to say that, not if you don't want to be a father!" she threatened.

"... Just for the record, the initial mating steps are over, so, no, we won't be needing to worry about the other candidates for another year." Hookfang interjected.

"Which just leaves me a whole year for you to have me all to yourself!" Snotlout supplied. Then, he gave her another permanent seeming grin, which Astrid tried to pummel to oblivion anyways. I had to hand it to Snotlout, he was persistent. I guess, that's just how we were, human or dragon; that sort of thing ran in the family.

I chuckled a little at the thought that maybe Toothless would have a relationship like that one day. When he romantically tries to pursue someone and ends up getting pummeled all of the time. I know he hasn't been back in a week, but voyages, Quests, or whatever took time, most of it just getting there.

"Ugh, please don't tell me you approve of this..." Astrid groaned.

"Hey, what can I say? It runs in the family." I said simply.

Astrid glowered, yet again. "Sometimes Hiccup, I really just want to hit youâ€¦"

"And I'd deserve it!" I said with a cheer. I don't know why I was in such a good mood today, but maybe it had to do with a little epiphany I've had the last night. I've been stuck on the same exercise for the past week, now, I think I finally understood it. If I was right, thenâ€¦ maybe, I can fix everything. "But first, is everyone ready?"

"Soâ€¦ are we going now?"

"Just a sec! Hot Shot's going to score a point!" yelled Snotlout, using one of Gustav's many new nicknames. "He's goingâ€¦ he's goingâ€¦ Score!"

I nodded to Hookfang, "_Now_", we can see the King," I said, before anything else can hold us back.

After that, we flew over to the dragon nest once again, arriving over the volcano's peak.

I still haven't figured out the exact route, but if I had to wager, it probably followed some arcane principles. Space and where one traveled did not seem to make sense, travel time and destination seemed almost arbitrary. How dragons navigated through Helheim's Gate probably had to do with some special navigation lessons or something, because it seemed that this probably never seemed to affect anyone except for Vikings.

"So... about this King, what's he like?" questioned Snotlout. He never met the King, mostly because he was too busy with the whole 'mating' scene.

"Oh, he's... specialâ€¦" By which I mean, that King was as special as Thor or Odin was, he for all intents and purposes might as well be a god among dragons. The King wasâ€¦ beyond real definition in my mind. He was something like a natural phenomenon like a thunderstorm with a face. Dragons pretty much agreed the King possessed vast power, even if he was bound to where he was, but I don't think many really got the scale of him. He was huge, massive, unstoppable. I was really sure that only a demigod or something close could stand up to him.

"Special huh?" muttered Snotlout, as if thinking about it. He didn't exactly have much reason to be here now, since well, the mating festivities were over. The child, I guess, egg rearing part was now. I figure the only reason he was coming along with us was probably because Astrid wanted to come here which in turn was only because of me.

"Special," Astrid said flatly. "Anyways, we should get going."

I nodded. "Well, you're welcome to try coming along," I said, mostly out of politeness. I mean, I didn't always dislike my cousin.

"Alright," Snotlout said as if it was the easiest thing in the world.

"I'd like to see what makes this King of allâ€¦ Kin so important!"

"...I really advise not-Sire!" Hookfang tried to warn Snotlout about the King, but Snotlout ignored him and darted into the volcano. Hookfang then followed.

Shrugging my imaginary shoulders, I flew in after them.

Entering the dragon nest, I found it surprisingly empty ofâ€¦ well dragons, at least on the top most platforms, which were normally bustling with activity. Now, they were empty, like they all just got up and left. I know the mating season tended to have most of the population leave for parts I did not know, but looking at this, just did not seem real.

"Wait, where is everyone?" I asked, perplexed.

"Over there! At the bottom!" Astrid pointed out. Sure enough, she was right. Going deeper into volcano, I found our missing dragons, all gathering at the lower ledges and platforms for... something. "But what are they doing?"

"They'reâ€¦gathering to the Kin," I said, noting how most of the dragons were mostly just sitting with their heads pointed to the vast bank of fog at the bottom.

"Think it's one of those gathering things Stormfly told me about."

"No, not one of those," I said, simply. I know the King sometimes audiences for the whole of the dragonâ€¦ public, but I somehow knew this wasn't the same thing. They were all gathering towards the King, sure, but it was neither the night of the New Moon, nor was there a summons, inviting all dragons, all Kin, to join in. No, this had to be something else.

As I got closer to the bottom, I noticed a few more things were off. While the platform that held the Flight Commanders and their Flight was empty, except for the one belonging to my Mom's Flight, there was another set of platforms just above them that I was pretty sure were not previously there before. On each of those platforms were dragons that were not normally found in the raids, all seemingly organized by what type of dragon they were.

The most noticeable of them was a long snake-like dragon that glowed bright gold surrounded by vastly smaller, yet similar dragons. I think I seen them before in the Book of Dragons, Fireworms, weren't they? "Once again, King and Lord of this Domain, why have you forsaken us?" I heard the large golden one say. Her voice had a distinctâ€¦ feminine quality.

The King's head stirred, turning to the golden dragon. ***"Matriarch, it is not my intention nor my desire to abandon those I have agreed to protect; we are all Kindred here."***

"Yet, such protection has not saved my predecessor from the depredations of your so-called 'Usurper'!" said one other, this time a blue-ish green creature that looked like a mix between a small whale and a dragon. A Thunderdrum, like Roland.

"**He is none of your concern,**" said the King. "**My Knights-"

"Have fallen to a force of Herd!" said yet another strange dragon, somehow resembling a Gronckle yet the eyes seemed to be off. His voice was harsh and angry voice. Then, shook his head and recollected himself. "Your protection that has guided our ancestors for many generations, yet now it fails us."

Another, this time a more recognizable type of dragon, a Nadder, stepped forward. "While our ancestors have chosen not to serve you as subjects many generations ago, we still were promised protection in exchange for services rendered has those pacts been rendered void?"

"**The pacts, that I forged with your ancestors is still in place,**" said the King, strangely calm and collected, even when being interrupted. "**Even in the coldest Winters, my Knights still serve..."**

"Yet, these pacts are empty promises now!" said one other dragon with a reddish-greenish hide and whiskers that looked like pieces of kelp, a Changewing. "The Flights are not responding or even attacking the Usurper or his forces as they should! Were it not for the natural elusiveness of my Kin, my Breed, we would all surely perished by now! I would wager that others less fortunate would have perished."

There were a few murmurs of agreement in the crowd, all in hushed tones of worry and fear. I wasn't completely sure what going on, but if I had to guess, even the King had neighbors.

I joined up Hookfang and Snotlout as they circled just above the inprogress conversation. I guess even Snotlout knew when things were important enough not to interrupt.

"Whose are these...Kin?" Astrid asked Hookfang the same question I was about to.

"These the representatives from the King's allied Enclaves," explained Hookfang. "They meet every year or when disaster strikes."

I immediately recalled a lesson that Toothless gave me about the dragons who did not serve under the King's rule. "So like a 'Thing', then?" I asked. Hookfang just looked at me blankly. Yeah, not exactly something that gets easily understood in translation. "Just a political gathering where everyone just talks" I said, before turning back to the argument going down below.

The dragons had other complaints as well, about how times have become chaotic without the Flight's upholding order in the Archipelago. Some dragons have begun invading nests belonging to others, taking resources and captives much like Vikings did, with the results getting bloodier with every raid. There was a mother that lost her child and started scorching forests in her search, a rogue dragon evicting a nest of its occupants, islands sinking It was chaos without the King's authority. The list kept going on and on, and yet the King did not seem to so much as even blink one of his many eyes.

"Lord of this Domain, we do not challenge your rule!" said another dragon. He was too far away and in too poor lighting for me to see him. "We simply ask you to fulfil our ancestors agreements and protect us!" The crowd all seemed to agree upon that, few if anyone seemed to want to face the King.

"We wish to know why it is you have seemingly have done nothing," said the FirewyrM Matriarch.

"**Youâ€¦ do not fully understand my stratagems,**" said the King, his tone almost waving, like he was trying to maintain the facade of politeness. "**Suffice it to say, I have steps to ensure his defeat." **If I had to guess, Alvin might have been wrecking havoc on the dragons. I mean, he was the Usurper, right? I guess an unstoppable, fireproof, quickly healingâ€¦ thing like him was just too difficult to face.

"You've gathered your forces in your domain! _Nothing_ has been done about him!" screech the Matriarch.

The Thunderdrum chimed in, "Rumor has it that you a offering a great and terrible power to an undeserving, untested youth. One that is not even a proper Knight or an upper class servant."

"My son is not undeserving!" I heard my Mom shout. She stayed quiet throughout the whole debate, but I think the Fireworm Matriarch and the Thunderdrum set her off.

"Wellâ€¦ I'll admit to being a little undeserving." I said as I landed onto Mom's platform. With the eyes of a thousand dragon looking at me, I suddenly felt really small, even more so than when the King looked at my direction. "I'm not a Knight, I'm not even a Squire, but I've been testedâ€¦ a lot, more than I'd care to have been, but yeah, maybe I'm undeservingâ€¦" I managed to say nervously.

Mom gave me a look of astonishment, as if just barely able to understand what I just did. "Child, what are you doing here!?" she barked. "This does not concern you! Leave at once," she demanded.

"**Unfortunately, you are incorrect, my Flight Commander," **the King said with a chuckle. "**The Usurper is a matter that is quite tied in with your family. It is fortunate that you have come when you did." **Which was true, Alvin wasâ€¦ from Berk if what I learned was true. I bet Dad might have known him before, well, things went bad.

"For the last time, my name is Hiccup," I know it might have been rude, maybe enough to get me killed, to do this in front of maybe a thousand dragons, but I have asked the King, repeatedly on multiple times and occasions to use my actual name. I was just reaffirming it with every dragon here as my witness.

The King seemed to be mildly amused by my little stunt. "**Very well, **_**Hiccup.**_**" **I think the only reason he said my name this time was because I have forced him to. He turned back to the crowd of dragons, pointing his massive head skyward. "**For your information, yes, this is the youth I have been empowering and though his family has ties to the Usurper, but he is not part of my plans to rout his

forces." **I almost gave a sigh of relief upon hearing that; Alvinâ€| was not someone people should look forward to fighting.

"And what purpose would that be?" asked one of the dragons.

"**A debt must simply be paid," **said the King.

The other dragons, seemed to nod in acceptance of that. I suppose to dragons, paying debts was a big deal. "But still, you grant one so young great power, it is not done without preparation."

"Especially oneâ€| strange as this one. What is that thing he wears on him? Why does he wear the dried up hide of a beast?" said another, probably referring to my leather saddle.

"And what does he have one of the Herd on his back?"

"If it is of the Herd it must certainly be some sort-"

"An aberration, we get itâ€|" Astrid grumbled.

"Thank you, Astrid..." I said.

The dragons all locked eyes on Astrid, their gazes, even at this distance, conveying scrutiny as well as suspicion. It seemed to be a recurring trend, whenever Astrid spoke to dragons who still thought humans were still wild beasts without even complex language. She was outside of their understanding, their beliefs on how the world should have worked; Herd should not, could not speak to Kin. Boy, if only they knew about the sort of things humans said about them.

"Regardless of thisâ€| creature..." mumbled one of the dragons as he finally got over the initial shock. "It is-

"She is," I corrected him. Astrid gave me a malicious grin.

"She is not of our concern" said the dragon. "Instead, we must focus on the topic of Usurperâ€| as well as the young maleâ€|"

"Agreed, "He may be a Night Fury, the rarest of the Breeds, but I do not think it is ideal to be teaching one so young powerâ€| especially not one that is so odd."

"His oddity is not relevant, but rather the time the King spendsâ€| teaching him."

"**There is nothing that can be done about the Usurper yet, I simply am biding my time," **said the King.

"Perhaps," said another, in a tone that said 'I might run any minute now, please don't me'. "But, surely, would that time not be better spent on someoneâ€| more valuable, more deserving."

Mom hissed, but didn't say anything. For a moment, I imagined she would go fly up to those ledges and take on every dragon that so much as dared so much as looking at me directlyâ€| and win. I placed my paw over one of hers, hoping that maybe my presence might hold her back. Astrid did too, but well, she couldn't fly, so I didn't need to worry about her.

Now that I thought about it, from what I was able to pick up from the conversation, it seemed a little odd with the strange position the King was in. The King obviously valued his allies, enough not to force them to submit to his authority and still offer protection for what might have been minor tributes. He had an enemy attacking his allies, yet he did nothing to help them, that didn't make much senseâ€| unless there was something to gain by waiting. But if that was the case, what did the King have to gain? It probably didn't matter to me, at least, not yet.

"Look, I'm not going to say that I am worthy or deserving; I'm pretty sure that many of you in here are probably greater than I am..." I said. Several dragons grinned at my words, probably thinking I was referring to them; dragons were many things, humble was not often one of them.

"**That is where you are wrong, **_**Hiccup," **_the King said, loud enough that I was sure the whole of the Barbaric Archipelago could have heard it. ****_**You**_** are far greater, more deserving to know power than you truly realize."**

If I had to compare how small I felt earlier, to how small I felt now, it was like I had shrunk down from a rabbit to a cricket. The idea that the King, the absolute ruler of a great nation of dragons was singling me out, lifting me up on a high pedestal, utterly terrified me.

Hundreds of dragons, both in the Enclaves and in the King's service, looked at me with bewildered looks of confusion, bewilderment, and worst of all, jealousy.

"By what right does he is he deserving!?" One dragon shouted. Many other joined him.

"If he is so worthy, then he must prove it! Let me see for myself if he truly is!" said another.

"This isâ€| unacceptable! I challenge him!" said even more.

"As do I!"

"And me!"

"This is not fair!" said a voice from behind me. Mom turned and slapped one of her Knights with her tail.

And then, suddenly the whole situation seemed to change entirely. Now it seemed everyone wanted a piece of me. Politics practically dissolved, as suddenly became a contest to see who could bring an upstart young Night Fury down to his knees.

The King had a pensive look on his face, as if considering who he should be supporting. **"I suppose it is in the right of all Kin to challenge one anotherâ€|" **he said neutrally, much to my horror.

"Then, let it be so!" said the Fireworm Matriarch. "If he is truly worthy as you say he is, we shall see it for ourselves!"

I didn't even need to wonder what kind of challenge they all had in mind. Vikings and dragons oddly enough had plenty of the same ideas for how things like worthiness, entitlement or the like worked out. Among Vikings, usually that meant...

"To the death!" a chorus of dragons cried out.

I would have preferred being a frozen statueâ€|.

* * *

><p>I hated working for Alvin, that much I already knew. I liked working with fire and twisting metal, almost as much as I used to love blasting something to bits with a blast of concentrated plasma. But putting a hammer to anvil for Alvin's sake? That put everything in a harsher, more negative light.<p>

And to think, I could have instead spent my time just flying on my brother's back or working on getting peopleâ€| back to being people in time for the Snoggletog festivities. I could have gotten presents for all of my friends, probably made by my own two hands or maybe do something with Stormfly other than lounge in a cageâ€|

And yet, here I was, toiling away for a monster. A more selfish part of me wished Hiccup was here, but no, he had the right idea. This whole escapade was a trap meant for him and he was smart enough to see through itâ€| Oh, how I wish I was. Even thought of spending the rest of Winter with Mother did not seem as bad as what I had gotten myself into...

I looked into the furnace, watching ore melt into liquid metal, wishing things were different.

"Is it ready yet!?" I heard a voice from just over me chatter.

"No, these things take time," I said glumly, much the annoyance voice's owner.

"You've had a week!" said the voice.

"And I'm working as much as I can!" I said as I turned to face the voice's origin, unafraid.

Normally, scowls were an indication of danger, a sign that said someone was just about ready to bust the head of the first person that so much as gave an awkward look. That probably would have applied if my overseer was _not _small enough to sit on my shoulders. "You better have it done this time!" said the Terrible Terror, an indication of annoyance that was most absolutely _not _backed by his small size.

I just shrugged and went back to watching the metal melt, it was far more interesting and far more relevant. The Terror was still watching, but I was sure it would take more than his personal annoyances to summon Alvin.

I have officially decided that I now hate Terrible Terrors. I don't know why, but it seemed like no matter what I did, anything involving them seemed to be bad for me. First there was Trader Al, the Terror Flight Commander. I hated that he taken Hiccup captive and brought

him before the King, cementing his being a dragon. He also brought my friends, the other Squires, to Berk, also his doing. It was because of him Astrid, Fishlegs, andâ€¦ someone else had to work on getting them out of prison.

Now, there was this one, Savage, this one little Terror with a name that certainly did not suit his size at all, watched everything I ever did from the ceiling. The one reason Hiccup and I were able to engineer a jailbreak the first time was because Alvin thought that we only really needed watching every now and again, not constant supervisionâ€¦ Now, with this Terror, who apparently was Alvin's right hand manâ€¦ er, man-turned-dragon, looming over my head, I couldn't even get away with sitting in a corner while waiting for iron ore to melt without getting an earful.

I hated the little pest so I wished I could wring his neck, but he was always out of reachâ€¦ and the guards at the door would stop me if I so much as made an

Once I was the sure I had enough iron funneled into the smelting pot, I poured out the liquid metal into a flat disc shaped cast.

I waited for the iron to cool a little, enough to be form a single piece before I picked it up with some smithing tongs. With the metal still hot and still malleable, I pounded at it, bending the sheet of metal until it formed a dome shape. What was I was trying to make was a helmet, a typical Viking 'brace-helm', sans the ornamental horns, since in their place were holes for the horns belonging intended recipient, and maybe a little larger than usual, but still most undoubtedly a helmet. Why Alvin wanted me to make a helmet for him was beyond me, but it kept me and my friends aliveâ€¦ for now. After that, I quenched the metal, permanently locking the iron in that shape.

Then, I had to added in an extra, more esoteric step normal helmets did not have to go through. Using what little knew about the other, special Norse runes, I carved in words of protection and strength into the metal, hoping that it would be enough.

Lastly, I added the finishing touches, mostly just to waste as much time as possible; more time spent designing one helmet meant less times I had to see Alvin per day. I added some iron strips and some rivets in key locations to make sure the iron was more secure in its shape. I put some wool in the doom and lined the inside with leather for extra supportâ€¦ just because I cared so much about Alvin's comfort and all.

"Alright, now I'm done!" I barked to the Terrible Terror.

"Good! Maybe this time, we could finally send you to do something far more useful!" said the Savage. "Guards, one of you, tell him it's time!"

One of the guards was a dragon, more specifically, a stout Gronckle, so he was able to understand Savage perfectly. His comrade in arms, though still human, got the message and let him pass through before locking the only exit door in my little hole.

I didn't have to wait long for Alvin to show up, probably because he's been getting real anxious for me to make him his helmet for a

while now. Hopefully, he wouldn't be disappointed from the wait..

I also saw a brief a brief glimpse of Camicazi standing just outside the door. She came by every now and again. She never said anything, but I knew the traitor kept visiting me, probably just to make sure I was never going to run away.

Asked Alvin as he stepped it, flanked by the Gronkcle guard Outcast, "So, hav' ya finally finished it, runt?" The door slammed shut behind him. Savage took a moment to perch on the half-dragon, half-man abomination's shoulder,

I nodded and presented him my offering. Maybe this time, he would finally be satisfied.

Alvin eagerly took the helmet and put it on its head. For a moment, he seemed to approve of it. The helmet fit on his head perfectly, since I've had plenty of practice designing around his head in the past week. Brace helms were simple, adaptable, and relatively easy to make, after all. He was about to give me a devilish grin, a sign of being pleased, before his face contorted into a frown. "Another failure! Yer wearing me patience thin, ya' runt!" he spat. Then, Alvin took off the helmet and then tossed it into the furnace.

I just stood there, exasperated. Alvin was _still _not satisfied, even after all of the work I put into making the last several dozen. "What's wrong this time!?" I said, forgetting for an instant this man...dragonâ€| beast could cut me open right here, right now.

For my mistake, Alvin picked me up by my neck, went over to the nearest wall and slammed my back against it. I groaned in agony as I fell to the floor, just barely able to understand. "It doesn't offer me protection!"

"From-From what?" I managed to choke out.

Alvin scowled, not answering my question. "Toothless, blah! they should have called you Useless!" A part of me couldn't help but agree. After all, the only reason I got my name was because of him...

With some difficulty, I managed to stagger onto my feet. I wanted to go shout at Alvin, to tell him that without knowing what he actually wanted these helmets for, I could do nothing other than make say helmets that were fireproof or blocked arrows betterâ€| because he totally needed those things. But the saner, more fearful kept me from making another outburst.

This was one of the problems I had with word based magic. I knew just enough about words for enchantments that I could actually put a little magic into my work without Hiccup telling me what to do. But the thing was, I didn't know what Alvin wanted me to make the helmets for, I couldn't write any runes that might have helped. "Hm, maybe I should give ya a reason to work harder, A little... motivation," Alvin said, which made my blood start to run cold. "Perhaps I should pay a visit to your little friends... see if I can break anything else in there miserable little bodiesâ€|"

I don't normally do this, but I bent onto my knees and groveled at his feet. I knew what he really meant and I did not like it. "Alvin,

please, no!" I choked out. I was scared, terrified. This was an all time low for me, not that I had to go very far. I was resorting to begging now, the most shameful of all acts.

But which one... the fat one? Or maybe the one that won't shut her trap, Oh, I know... How about that red head ya can't seem to take yer eyes of... maybe I should break her other arm, or perhaps a leg."

I felt my heart sink even further the moment he singled her out. The thought I might not be able to protect _her _of all people scared me even more than the shame I felt. Now, I became even more desperate. I started saying things, hoping anything might buy Stormfly a little more time. "Alvin!" I'm working as fast as I can! Please I promise! I'll have something ready again in an hour!"

"Oh, I really find that hard to believe.." the Outcast Chief said with glee. "But I guess I can be a little more generous. If ya can work out how ta protect my head, she can keep hers just that little bit longer."

I nodded my head vigorously, accepting the terms out of desperation rather than actually liking them.

Alvin grinned, probably thinking of the best way to remove Stormfly's head. "Well? What are ya waiting for? Get back to work before I rip yer head off!" Then, for good measure, he picked me up once again and tossed me to the center of the room.

On the ground, several disturbing thoughts went through my mind. I suddenly understood that Stormfly's life, as did the lives of Fishlegs and Meatlug, rested solely on what I was about to do the next hour. Two, I didn't know what I could possibly do to make a helmet Alvin would be contented with. And lastly, somehow, I understood that giving Alvin what he wanted, even if it was just a stupid helmet, would just mean that Alvin would have no further use for me or my friends!

As the Outcast Chief walked out, he gave some really basic orders to Savage and his men to make extra sure I was working even harder than normal! As I stood up, I knew I was about to work harder on what I was about to do more than I ever had on anything else in my life; I also knew it was _not _going to be another helmet.

The Outcast Chief then left the room, leaving me in a room with a Terror, A Gronckle and a man.

I struggled to my feet and went back to the furnace. Inside, the helmet Alvin discarded slowly melted away in the blaze, becoming nothing but useless scraps and cinders! And if I didn't figure out some way to get myself free, I knew my friends would be going up in flames, too.

Thinking about my captors, I wondered what was the best way I could overcome them. The Terror, I knew, would be easy to fight, handily over, but the other two were far stronger and tougher than I was. I would go down with a single punch if I didn't have some way to get rid of them!

It was times like these, I wished I was not a weakling of boy, someone with real, tangible power at his command. At the very least,

I wished I could lie to myself a little, to have a way to pretend I was a Night Fury, once again. I would have brewed that potion my brother made, but Alvin was too smart to let that happenâ€¦

I absentmindedly stoked the fire, wishing that I could make a plasma blastâ€¦ I sighed, feeling helpless. Who was I kidding? It that would be a godsend, maybe enough to get me out of this room, but it's not like I could whip up some sort of explosion with magic, now could Iâ€¦? Suddenly, I realized, I never tried using my understanding of magic that way...

The smelting pot had maybe a few ounces of liquid iron left, enough for maybe a few hastily scrawled in runes. If I were to write a few runes, with the right words and intentions behind them, would I be able to create an explosion? Could, I make a ball of fire, using what I knew about runes? And if I couldâ€¦ would I be willing to try? If the guards stopped me, I would probably be cut down here and now...

I took the pot of melted iron and poured it on to the disc mold. If I didn't try, Stormfly was going to die; I had no other choice.

There wasn't enough iron left to completely fill the mold, but what little there was gathered into a blob of reddish-orange metal, enough for my purposes. I dunked the iron glob into the water, turning it into a fat, misshapenâ€¦ object, since I had no idea what else to call it.

I turned to see the guards and the Terror, eying me suspiciously, but not acting upon it. They probably thought, I was still working on a helmet or maybe trying a different way to solve Alvin's problemâ€¦ Well, I was fine with that, I could do what I wanted and they wouldn't stop me.

So, now came the critical part. Unlike my brother when he plotted to make Zippleback gas explode, I didn't have several weeks to plan out making explosives, nor did I have any guarantee this would work. Everything, I knew about sorcery and rune making told me that intentions and ideas were as important to the process as much as knowing the words to use. I was sure of the using the words 'fire' and 'burst', but what I was not sure of the ideas to use to back them upâ€¦

I immediately slapped myself in the forehead as an idea, a crazy idea bubbled to the surface of my thoughts. If ideas and intentions were important and shaped the spells I wove, what about memories? As I put the desired words in, I thought back to my days as a Night Fury. I thought about every time I ever used my Breath, the power that I inside of me. Enemies toppled beneath my might, hardened stone fell at my command. With every thought, with every imagined idea and memory, the words I wrote glowed with an ever brightening glow.

"What are you doing?" I heard Savage question. Turning, I found him above me, circling just overhead. I also found the other guards, staring at me, noticing that I was _not _making another helmet like I was supposed to.

I smirked, the happiest I have ever been in a week. I didn't bother replying to them. Instead, I threw the little glob of iron in my

hands right at the door. I was desperate and I didn't know if my enchantment worked, but it was either now or never.

As it turned out, it worked, although a little differently than what I had originally anticipated. The misshapen iron glob exploded in a bright flash that was more than just an ordinary fire; a blast of plasma, exactly like the kind I used to make, burst right on top of the door between the two guards. The flash light and force knocked the two guards down to the ground and busted the door open.

"WHAT DID YOU DO!?" the Terror shrieked angrily, stunned that I was able to pull off what I had just done.

Taking advantage of his shock, I picked up the ash shovel and hit Savage with it, sending him flying into a pile of charcoal. "And that's for being an annoying little dragon!" I shouted. I think I'll reconsider my opinion of Terrors now. They're not too bad, especially when I had a shovel; they were practically axes with the right

Turning back to the guards, I feared that my captors would soon recover and take me down, but it seems that I had caught a lucky break; the two guards, Gronckle and Viking, both lay on the hard stony floor, unmoving and groaning. I smirked, I should have done this a long time ago. A crueller part of me probably would have spent a little time making sure they stayed down, for good, but I decided I didn't have much time for that. With my little stunt back there, I had no doubt the area would be crawling with Outcasts in a moment...

I sprinted out the door and into the labyrinthine tunnels, having no idea where to go, other than what my heart told me. My friends, most especially Stormfly, I need to make sure they were safe.

* * *

><p>Hiccup can't seem to go anywhere without someone challenging him. I guess that's one advantage of being a scrawny boy, most people don't even think about him putting a good fight.

I had to translate the word '_**Spangenhelm' '**_**into 'brace helm' because since everyone in this fic used Norse, for consistency I could not leave it as it was. There's quite alot of articles for how that works, so I found myself reading on helmet making.**

And yes, I have put everyone into potentially dangerous situations.

19. Chapter 19

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

**Well, I'm glad that I'm able to make it this far. It's both getting easier and harder to write chapters, but I'm overall getting the feeling it's worth it. **

Hope you all enjoy this one. Things are ramping up.

****Also, there's a vote at the bottom, relevant to the next few chapters, just giving you a heads up.****

****Enjoy, see you til next time,
>End.**

*** * ***

><p>A few months ago, if anyone told me that I was someone people wanted to fight because some godlike being decided I was 'worthy' of something, anything, I would have asked Dad to tie him to a mast and ship him off for fear he'd gone mad. Now, it seemed like I couldn't go anywhere without someone, anyone wanting to test me, to challenge me to a fight. Even on Berk, there were always few people who have decided to take me on because they, by some insanity even I couldn't understand, thought I was a worthy opponent. Yes, I'm pretty sure that my opponents were drawn to me because of my well developed martial skills and that my being a Night Fury, the rarest kind of dragon, had nothing to do with it.<p>

The dragons above me called out for my blood, each declaring a pronouncement of challenge and outrage. Hundreds of dragons, those lived in the Enclaves or served the King alike, wanted to take me down, all because the King said that I was 'worthy' enough to learn a little more about sorcery.

"But-but I don't want to fight anyone!" I managed to choke out, my fear clogging up my throat like a hard stone. I felt like breaking down then and there; I wanted to fly away, not face an armyâ€|

"Coward!" I heard a dragon yell. "Unworthy to learn power! Forfeit!"

I was about to, just so I could get out of not facing a thousand dragons all at once, but then, I started paying attention to the other dragons, the ones who joined him with their own calls. "O, King, he forfeits his right!"

"Do not let him learn!" another said.

"Give that power to someone more worthy!"

I turned to the King, who gave a look that made me think he was deep in thought. ****"It does not take one such as me to know that you are considering yielding to those who challenge you," ****he said, his tone almost a forced kind of neutral. ****"Know that were such to happen, you would forfeit your right to continue learning under my instruction and I would be required to instead part those lessons to someone elseâ€|"********

It took me a moment to fully grasp what the King had just told me; I might not be able to learn the spell I asked from the King. "But-But would even know what to do with it!?" I said exasperated. Here I was, just a stone's throw away from finally accomplish my goal, now this problem shows up, potentially compromising everything I've been hoping to accomplish.

****That does not matter; wars are waged, battles are fought, power is**

won and lost. No one need not know or understand to desire." **said the King, almost remorsefullyâ€| almost. **"What matters here is that you are challenged on your right to acquire power and none, not even I, can deny any Kin the right to try and take it from you before you have truly received it." **

"But that's insane!" Astrid stepped forward, addressing the crowd of dragons above us. "You're asking _him _to fight just because he has something that you want?"

A part of me wanted to thank Astrid for having my back even now, but I knew better than that. Immediately, the dragons became booing her, shouting her down for getting involved, each calling her 'unfit to speak' or 'not worthy enough to listen to', but Astrid held firm, staring the dragons down in a political debate as bravely as if it was live combat. "Astrid, please, don't worry about it!" I whispered. I coiled my tail around her legs, hopefully reassuring her to calm down, just a little.

It didn't. He stepped out of the half loop my tail made and stared at me. "Hiccup! I'm not losing you again!" she shouted. Then, she turned back the dragons, a devilish grin on her lips. "Well, fine, if you are all going to challenge Hiccup, _I _am going to challenge all of _you!"_

The dragons in the cavern all gave roars of outrage at that declaration, all except for my Mom who gave Astrid an approving nod. "If you are truly sure about this, than our other Kin cannot deny you this right. You can stand by my son's side when he make his stand."

Astrid gave a nod of confirmation. "I figured as muchâ€|since our King keeps saying _I am Kin_, I might as well use it to our advantage." A shiver went through me as an odd mix of shame and pride flowed out of my heart. A few months ago, I would have given near anything for her to even pay attention about to me in a way that did not involve me setting someone's house on fire; now, I hated the very thought that she cared about me so. She was setting herself up as a potential adversary to maybe a hundred dragons, all because of me. Iâ€| didn't know what to do anymore. If there was anything I was not truly, it was not magic, not learning a specific spell; it was her.

"Astrid, please don't!" I begged again. "What are you even doing!?"

"Saving your bacon!" she whispered back.

"But-but I can handle it!"

"You versus a hundred _Kin?" _she questioned.

"Me versus a thousand _Kin," _I corrected. "Please, don't get involved Astrid!"

She gave me a wry smile, as if she expected me to say that. And then another idea seemed to flash over her face. "Hey, Snotlout!" she called out to the sky.

The large Nightmare who had been circling above almost disinterested

at the whole scene suddenly had a reason to pay attention. He swooped over, flying just above Astrid and my self, but no where near close to the King. "Uhâ€| hey babe!" he said, almost tripping himself over with the sudden attention. "What can I for you?"

"Oh, nothing, I was just thinking maybe you'd like to join Hiccup _and me_ for a little fight," she said to the Nightmare.

"Against all of theseâ€| lizardsâ€|?" As soon as he said that couple of dragons barked at him for his little 'insult', but Snotlout didn't seem to care at least, not that I could still. Still, I knew even he at least paid attention to the fact to a dozen or a hundred dragons wanted to fight me to the death.

"Well, since you like to brag about how strong and allâ€|" Those were the only words Astrid needed to say for Snotlout to completely turn his entire outlook around.

"Oh, well, I am! Sure, I can take on a few lousy reptiles!" At that, the dragons, tried to shoo Snotlout away again, to shout him out of the cavern because he was getting in the way. Some even resorted to using fire, but Snotlout didn't so much as give them his attention.

"Sire, please don't do thisâ€|" I heard Hookfang say, chasing after the circling dragon.

"Ah, you worry too much, Hookfang!" Snotlout said, sounding so sure of himself, even I saw starting to look even more upbeat. A part of me was guilty for having Snotlout join my so-called 'side', but no where near as much as I was over Astrid. Aside from thatâ€| I knew I needed him to stand by me, if only to make up for my own lack of fighting prowess. It doesn't get much tougher than Nightmaresâ€| and my cousin was not second best in class because he collected teeth.

"Heâ€| reminds me so much of my brother in law," I heard Mom mutter to myself, for a moment, taking my attention. I mean, as far as I knew, Spitelout was my Dad's only brother. I mean, did that mean, Spitelout wasâ€| I shook my head, nah, that couldn't be.

Still, with my attention on Mom, I suddenly realized that maybe she had the means so shut down this insanity once and for all. I mean, she was a Flight Commander, second to only the King in his Domain. "Momâ€|" I tried to say, but her tail went over to my lips, in a single instant stopping my words.

"No, child, no one, not even the King may stop a challenge once declaredâ€|" she said regretfully.

"Then what can we do?" I asked.

"We can set the standards of the competition," Mom told me. "Isn't that right, our King?"

Before I could ask what she meant by that, she turned to the King who sat patiently as a statue, waiting for the right moment to speak in that loud voice of his. "*"It is as you say, my lieutenant, the challenged has limited authority to set the rules for how the conflict is carried out, whereas what is at stake is set by the

challenger."**

The dragons above all gave nodding, respectful looks, clearly not liking it, but still bowing at the King's words.

"Thanâ€¦ what rules can I set?"

"**If you so desire, you can set the number of combatants allowed in the field, so long as you do not allow yourself a numerical advantage," **said the King. **"You may allow your allies to fight by your side, so long as you at least give an equal number of enemies to face." **

Suddenly, I thought that maybe these arcane rules for how fighting is to be carried out might actually work in my favor. Maybe they could... "So, if I wanted to fight aloneâ€¦?"

"**You can set yourself against a single opponentâ€¦ or more."**

Astrid gave me a punch that probably might have sent my teeth flying if they weren't all retracted into my mouth. "What are you doing, Hiccup?"

"Saving _your bacon_!" I said, picking myself up.

"You're only going to get yourself killedâ€¦"

"**However, as the Nadder and the Nightmare have declared their own challenges, to other Kin over the right to challenge you in your support, their challenge would need to be resolved first before yours may be allowed to take place. Their challenge may not be stopped, but for simplicity's sake, can be allowed to merge with yours."**

I silently cursed whoever designed these rules. Astrid and Snotlout were stuck on my 'side', as much as I didn't want them to. Astrid gave me a vicious grin, clearly satisfied. "Alright, so, three-on-three then," I said, wishing my friends could just withdraw, but I knew neither of them would. "What else can I set?"

"**In cases where multiple parties attempt to challenge you, you may simply allow only a single party, the ones that have both the strongest claim and among the the greatest prowess to challenge you," **the King said, much to my relief. So, I didn't have to do face a thousand dragons after all! **"Simply put, a challenge is a test of skill and prowess between evenly matched combatants, not how many foes one must vanquish before fatigue sets in, for even the mightiest mountain easily falls to the tide given enough time. Simply letting those who are the strongest allows for the most fairness."**

"Great, so strongest, it is then." I told the King.

The massive dragon's head nodded in confirmation and turned to address the crowd. "**Then it is so, only those who have strong claims to the power and able to challenge the Night Fury may stand against the Night Fury and his companions, who among you has the greatest claim?"**

Plenty of the dragons above me complained and most of them seemed to flatout give up entirely once they realized that it was not going to

be a simple matter of just getting lucky, but still plenty of them banded together to form their own groups. Others started picking fights with one another, short little spats meant to rise them just a bit higher in rank. I was just glad that I would that the situation would be changing from 'absolutely hopeless' to 'very likely to die'; whoever I was going to be fighting, they were going to be the best the dragons had to offer and I knew I was decidedly _not _that good.

Astrid gave me an approving nod. "Oh, good, so not all of your ideas are totally crazy."

"Only most of them," I corrected.

"Soâ€¦ strongest enemies, huh?" Snotlout commented as he landed.
"Works for me."

"Please, my liege, it's not too late to back out," Hookfang begged.
"Not when things aren't finalized."

"Aw, come on, Hookfang! It'll be fun, hey, you should join, too," Snotlout replied.

Hookfang took a step back, unwilling to fight. "No, sire, I can't do thatâ€¦"

"Heh!" Snotlout said, "suit yourself, Hookfang!"

I felt sorry for Hookfang, here I was, using my cousin to help me with a fight, one we could potentially die in and here, the Nightmare cared more for his well being than I ever did. I wanted to promise the large dragon that I would make sure he would be fine, but someone else beat me to it. "Oh, do not fret, _little brother, _I will make sure that yourâ€¦ liege is not hurt, too much," said a voice just over head. Circling above us was another Nightmare, this one with scales not all too dissimilar from Hookfang, except, well, a girl...

Hookfang made a face at the new dragon, clearly the 'little brother' comment was a sore point. "You only hatched by five minutes more," grumbled the dragon.

"And we both know I should have been selected for the Knighthoodâ€¦ honestly what was our Grandfather thinking? I'm sure I would have made a difference."

Hookfang backed away, a little ashamed at that.

"And what's this 'Hookfang' these others keep call you."

"It'sâ€¦ my name," Hookfang said embarrassedly as if ashamed, but he shook himself out of it and then added, "Speaking of which, why are you here? You lack a name and as well as the status of being a Knight."

"**Her claim is stronger than most," **said the King. "**Not only does she have a have priority since her grandfather was slain, she is an adversary that is not too dissimilar from yourselves, little of glory and fame, but full of potential and desire for power, a
fair ****challenge.**"

"Great, glad to be fighting you," I said to the new Nightmare, glad I was not going to be facing someone who wasn't a master tail fighter or Breath blaster. Hookfang though didn't seem to share my sympathiesâ€| probably because, well, she was his sister. I guess they must have same from the same clutch of eggs or something.

The female Nightmare though seemed to take a smug sort of satisfaction upon hearing my words. "As you should be," she sounded so confident in herself, I almost felt like quavering in my imaginary boots. "Brother dear, why does yourâ€| liege keep staring at me?"

Snotlout oddly enough seemed to be silent, his eyes fixated on the new dragon. "Uhâ€| don't mind him," I said for my frozen cousin. Even I didn't know.

"Soâ€|who else is coming?" Astrid called out to the dragons above.

"I do," said another voice. Before us, another dragon, a Changewing swooped down onto the platform set aside for my Mom's Flight, fully visible. As she stepped closer, she shifted colors rapidly, as if unable to decide what she'd like to be. "Many of my Kin were taken by the Usurper and I lay claim to that blood debt, it will be an honor to face you."

Astrid gave her a nod. "And you are?"

"Nameless and hoping for enough glory to earn one," said the Changewing.

"Well, I'm sure defeating any one of us might do that," I said almost encouragingly. So far, things seemed pretty good for me and my friends. We were not facing dragons so far out of our league; in fact, they didn't even have names. They weren't masters or really notable, maybe they were even on our skill level.

Several of the dragons above gave shouts of anger. Obviously, they realized by now that two relative novices, untrained individuals were chosen instead of stronger, more powerful dragons. I turned to the King, thinking that maybe he was stacking things in our favor. Then again, a part of me really doubt that. **"Remember that I said only the strongest with the greatest *_*_claims*_*_ may challenge the Night Fury and his companions. It is simply unreasonable to allow younglings to face their eld-"**

"Get a strong Kin to fight!" shouted one.

"No more weaklings!" said another.

All over the cavern there was an uproar for a stronger opponent, someone who probably had a chance to take on me and all of my friendsâ€| by himself and win.

The King gave me a glance with a single of his many eyes, wanting to know my thoughts.

This was actually a harder decision than I thought. On the one hand, I could allow that request and risk getting everyone in my party

killed. On the other hand, I could deny the petition, and risk something worse; the dragons did not seem like the kind of people to just let me get away with it.

I nodded my head, giving the King the answer he needed. **"Then I call Skullcrusher to face the Night Fury,"** he said. The crowd roared with excitement, much to my horror. Dragons only got their names from their deeds and there was such importance on being worthy of getting one that it seemed it was common for dragons to remain nameless throughout their whole lives. I also know that combat was just one way to get a name, but I knew most of those that have them got theirs that way. And I sincerely doubted, a name like Skullcrusher had any peaceful origins, unless it had to do with I don't know, obsessively eating every bone.

A large dragon, one of a kind that I have never seen before flew out from one of the platforms. He was strange to say the least. His body was squatter than a Night Fury's, yet leaner than a Gronckle's. His head made me immediately think it was smeared with blood and all the while the large horn made me wondering how much it could make me bleed. His neck almost seemed like it was plated by giant beetles and his wings seemed gigantic as my own, all covered in scars from previous battles. But more frightening than his appearance was his words. "I accept! I will fight for glory and honor!" he declared to the whole room, causing an uproar of draconic applause.

Skullcrusher took a moment to circle above the King's massive head, probably doing some sort of ritual or prayer. I started making my own prayers as well. Maybe Odin or Thor would be merciful.

"Then, if all of the other combatants are ready, we may begin."

"Well, I have been waiting forever to prove myself!" said Hookfang's sister.

"As have I!" said the Changewing.

"Uh, right," said Snotlout. He was still gaping at Hookfang's sister.

I nodded my head, feeling unsure about myself every passing minute.

Only Astrid didn't nod her head or otherwise confirm she was ready, mostly because I think she understood she wasn't.

All of the King's eyes turned to the blonde girl. **"As the right to challenges only applies to Kin, you do understand what needs to be done, child?"** **"Soon after he spoke, everyone in the cavern zeroed in on Astrid, waiting for something."**

Astrid nodded and began stepping forward, ever closer to the massive dragon.

As soon as I realized what was about to happen, I went in Astrid's way, stopping her for only a moment. "No, Astrid, don't!" I said. "You don't have to do this!"

"If we win this, you can fix me right?" she said.

"Uhâ€¦ I couldâ€¦" I tried to say, but my words felt so heavy. I know I was thinking on making Astrid fully human again, butâ€¦ I didn't think she would be using it against me, not like this.

"Then, if we win this we get everything the way we want it!" she said.

"Butâ€¦ we can still lose!"

"And I'm pretty sure I'm a better fighter than you are, so unless you want to face your enemies without me..." Astrid drew closer to me and stared me right in the eye. "It's all or nothing all or nothing, Hiccup. I'm either with you, or I'm not."

I couldn't stand to meet that partially human, partially dragon gaze. I backed away, feeling so useless I felt like taking back that old title of mine. I couldn't stop her! I didn't like being so weak and having her trade away something of hers for my sake, not again. Why couldn't I at least have been strong enough to stop that?

"**So you have decided, at last, young **_**Nadder**_**?" **the King said with extra emphasis this time, almost as if he was been waiting so anxiously for this moment for some time.

"I'm ready!"

And then, the King burned away the rest away Astrid's humanity.

* * *

><p>I ran as fast as I could, frantically trying to navigate my way through the confusing mess of tunnels and dim lit passageways. At the same time, I did my best to evade the scrambling masses of Outcast dragons and men, no doubt alerted by my little stunt maybe a few minutes ago. So far, I managed to sneak past a few patrols heading in the direction of the workshop Alvin set up for me, but I knew it was bound to be a matter of time before I was caught eventually.<p>

I had to hurry, there was no telling how much time left I had before Alvin decided to go to my friends andâ€¦ did horrible things to them. Yet at the same time, if my footsteps made too much noise or if my haste made me run into patrols, things would not have ended well for me either. It was a choice between being too late to save my friends or letting my own speed be my own end. I hated choices like this!

And to make matters even worse, I didn't even know where I was going. Even though I had spent maybe a week going back and forth between the cage I slept in and the workshop Alvin made for me alone, I still didn't know my way around! Every tunnel looked almost exactly the same as the rest, making me feel like I was running around in circles. It was no where near as bad Alvin's old base, but I still had to question the Outcast's sensibilities. Not even dragon caves are this messy!

Right now, I could see empty cages all around me, a prisoner holding area, maybe. I was hoping that maybe this was the place, that I was within arms reach from my friends and that I was not too late to save them. I ran with renewed vigor and took a right turn down one tunnel

and immediately darted back just in time to avoid a trio of Outcast warriors slowly making their down the tunnel, coming right at me.

"Alright boys, you heard the boss, we better find that kid to get that raise!" said a man holding the dim lit lantern.

"Bah!" replied another. "Alvin this, Alvin that! Wish I wasn't stuck here taking orders from him!"

"Don't let him hear you say that! You know what he'd do!"

"Bah," said the complaining Outcast. "or what? He'll give me some claws?"

"Heard the last man who crossed him ended up a Terror in a small gilded cage" said the third man who stayed silent until then. That seemed to shut up the complaining Outcast. Yeah, even I had to admit I hated the idea of being a Terror. If I was one I could only imagine how weak I'd be and how desperate I would be to prove I wasn't yuk.

Luckily for me, it sounded the Outcast didn't see me a moment ago, probably due to how dark everything in the tunnels were. For once, darkness did something other than make me wish I had my own light!

Still I could hear the footsteps of the Outcasts approaching, I knew that if I stayed here too long, they'd catch me. I slowly took a step back and promptly found my self landing on my rear, giving a loud painful grunt while I was at it. I must have stepped on a loose or wet stone and now that simple mistake was going to cost me.

"Hey! What was that!?" one of them shouted. I held my breath, hoping that maybe they'd ignore it.

They didn't; instead, I heard them take off into a sprint, coming at me far faster than I would like.

I panicked and took off on my own sprint, knowing that now stealth was useless.

"There he is! Get 'em!" I heard one of them shout. They definitely saw me.

Even worse, others definitely heard them. From the several tunnels over, I heard the march of heavy footsteps, human and dragon alike were all converging towards me.

I scrambled, making wild and frantic turns to evade my pursuers, but even then, I just found myself running into others, all brought on me by one simple mistake. One time, seeing no other way, I rolled underneath one of the dragons, causing my pursuers to stop as a mildly confused Gronckle held back a dozen Outcasts; it didn't help me much, there were still lots more of them coming right at me.

And then the fatigue set in. I've been running for only Odin's crows know how long and I've managed to successfully evade capture for now. My panic gave me a headstart when I started running, but even that had its limits. I was beginning to wear down, losing momentum

and there were still plenty of Outcasts who were after me. Desperate, I forced myself keep going, trying to keep them going even with my lungs burning and my legs cramping up from the strain.

And it wasn't enoughâ€¦|

I fell, tripping once again in so important of a point.

Dizzily, I was aware I was at some sort of intersection. I couldn't see any Outcasts, but I could hear them all coming from every direction.

I tried to pull myself, to drag myself off to the shadows for one last attempt to save my own hide. But it was no use, my breathing was too heavy and out of control; I couldn't muster enough strength to pull myself forward.

And then my worst fears came true, two hands gripped tightly onto my legs, a little less meatier than I expected, but still there. I knew that this was the end, I had made it so far, only too fall. Alvin was going to make Stormfly the others pay for my treachery.

The force tugging at my legs dragged me on my chest, making me taste a little of the floor as I panted to get more air in my lungs. And then, something odd happened. I was being pulled out of the intersection and into one of the very dark and empty cages relatively nearby.

Briefly, I wondered that maybe I was being locked up, but then I caught a glimpse at the one who wasâ€¦| aiding me? "Ca-Ca-Camicazi?" I managed to croak out.

"Hold still," she whispered, as she pulled out a large dark sheet blanket. Then in a swift action, she placed both of us against the far end of the cage wall.

"Wha-What are you doing?" I would have added 'you traitor' but I think I was too tired for more words.

Instead of answering me, she instead put her hands over my mouth. "Be quiet!" she whispered loud enough it might have been considered screaming. "And ew, stop doing that with your mouth!" she snapped.

I wanted to say, "You have your hand over my mouth," but it came out as mindless gibberish. Instead, I did my best to regain control of my breathing even though I felt like I was partially choking with Camicazi's gloved hand over my face.

Then, Camicazi tossed the dark fabric over both of us, just in time for the Outcast to arrive and notice I was not there. Through the dark cloth, I could barely see maybe a dozen lanterns, lots of Outcast search parties were right beside us. I held my now, thankfully, steadier breath and prayed to Loki, God of Deception, Pranks, and other assorted Chaos I would make it out alive.

"Where did he go!?" snapped one.

"I dunno!" said another.

"He can't have just disappeared! Someone is to blame to letting him

through!"

"He didn't go past me!"

"Nor me!"

"Oh yeah, Fistful? I seem to recall you let him dash right past you!"

Camicazi's blanket seemed to have done the trick, allowing us to practically be within spitting distance of an maybe a dozen Outcast patrols and they were none the wiser.

"Shutup!" shouted an Outcast who was probably a lieutenant or other leader. "Alvin should have your hide for this failure. And I mean _dragon_ hides!"

"You first then!" yelled another one. Then, I heard the sound of something heavy hit the floor, maybe metal.

"Enough!" said the leutenant. "We've lost the boyâ€¦ for now! But you better lock 'im up before Alvin decides to lock _you_!"

That was all the Outcasts needed to hear before they stampeded out in every other direction, all of them grumbling and complaining along the the patrols gone, everything became silent for a few minutes; nothing stirred, nothing happened.

Once I was sure there were no more Outcasts, I made my move. I broke Camicazi's hold on my mouth and pushed her away.

"Hey!" she complained. "That wasn't very nice you know!"

"Not very nice? I spat. "You betrayed got us locked up in a cage!" The memory of Stormfly shivering for most nights came to me.

Camicazi, the betrayer she was, looked offended. "Well, it's not like I had a choice in the matter!"

"You had no choice?" I nearly shouted. I kept my voice hopefully low enough not to attract any would be persuers. "It's because of you, I had toâ€¦" Not really knowing how to really explain, I threw my hands in the air. "All this!" Hopefully that conveyed it.

Camicazi nodded, getting it. "And what a good escape it wasâ€¦ for a boy," she said.

She was so infuriating. How could she be so calm in a time like this? "Why did you stab us in the back!"

"I didn't," she corrected. "I recall hitting you in the head, but no knives were involved."

I gritted my. She knew what I meant and she was simply toying with me, just like she did before she had us thrown in a cell to rot. "Just..Just, get out my my way!" I said walking towards the cell's iron bar doors. I had no time to deal with her, I had to save my-

"They're no longer there you know," Camicazi said, as if she knew I was thinking about them.

I turned back to her. "What do you mean?"

"I had them moved," she said with a smile.

"On his-?"

"No," Camicazi said simply. "I had my associate spirit them away."

I blinked. She had my friend taken somewhere else? But why?

Camicazi seemed to read my confused expression quite easily. "Well, I was planning it on doing it anyways, once I knew that Alvin's patience was wearing thin," she said as a matter of factly. She turned to me, a wry smile on her face. "And then you had to make exposition. Honestly, couldn't you have come up with a quieter way of breaking yourself out?" she scolded.

"It was all I had at the time!" I said.

"Well, whatever, once that happened, Alvin thought he'd save time and energy and just meet you where you were planning to go," Camicazi said her grin growing ever more vicious by the word. "Although, I'll admit, it was just priceless to find out the cage was emptied mere minutes after you decided you had enough following his command."

I blinked, suddenly realizing that maybe I hadn't thought of my little jailbreak plan thoroughly. The reason my brother's plan did so well was because it was done on multiple layers with multiple breakouts at the same time to throw off the Outcasts; my plan, if it could be called one, involved only me making a rather noisy and desperate attack, without even getting my friends ready to make their move to escape. The thought that Alvin was going to use that to his advantage did not sit well with me, and if Camicazi had not taken them away— Or did she?

I didn't want to believe her, but Camicazi's words sounded so reasonable, so trusting. And yet, I still wanted to deny it. "Why should I trust you?" The words had as much acid as I could put into them. "You could be lying." The cynical part of me felt it knew better, that Camicazi was misleading me, getting me away from saving Stormfly and the rest.

Camicazi approached me, her expression solemn, almost weary of things. "You shouldn't," she said in a regretful tone. "I betrayed your trust already, so why should you trust me?"

The sympathetic part of me wanted to trust her— she used to be my friend, not too long ago. And yet, I didn't want to believe it. I had to save my friends and now it felt like my heart was being pulled in to two and I was helpless to really do anything. Did I listen to an old friend who betrayed me or do I ignore her— there was only one way I knew to find out. "Why did you betray us?" I asked again.

Camicazi paused, thinking about it. "It's— complicated."

I frowned. That did not earn any sympathy from me. "Try me," I challenged.

Camicazi frowned. "Well, there's someâ€¦ personal issues involved," she said as if trying her best to explain.

"Personal issues?"

She nodded. "Well, sorta personal..." she said. "I'm not going to explain much more than that."

"Rightâ€¦" I nodded almost sympathetically. Did Camicazi maybe have justified reasons, that she did all of this, betraying us, selling us out to Alvin because she had no choice? I mean, I was stillâ€¦ mad at her, but the idea was so appealing, it dulled the edge of whatever knife was ran straight through my heart. But then again, if there were any, Alvin would have claimed it, right? He didn't know why Camicazi was involved. Still without any details, that claim was questionable. "Soâ€¦ these personal issues-"

"It'sâ€¦ private," she said with a blush. Okay, maybe they were real then, or at least it felt real enough for me to not view the Bog Burglar with a look of absolute hatred. "But aside from them, well, I've been thinking."

That caught my attention immediately. "About what?"

"I can't tell you everything, but I've been thinking about some things..." Camicazi said, redundantly.

"Like what?"

"Well, how'd Alvin get his spear or where he gets all his dragons," Camicazi said.

"Doesn't he just turn his Outcasts into dragons?" I said blankly.

Camicazi looked at me as if I said something stupid, something that I probably would have expected from Astrid or Stormfly, but not the Bog Burglar Heir. I mean, I never thought much about Alvin, not unless he was directly involved, so I didn't exactly think much about how he did everything he did. Although, now that that was pointed out, I had to wonder why Alvin needed me to make him a helmetâ€¦ "Well, forget it, then," she said.

"Well, we can talk about it_ later_," I offered, willing to take a gamble.

She noticed the little undertone in my last statement, that there was a 'later' for the two of us. She cracked a smile. "Oh, so you do trust me?"

"A little, but I don't like it." I admitted. I didn't see any other choice now, I had to trust that Camicazi did not really betray us after all. If she was being honest and that my friends were somewhere else, taken somewhere Alvin did not know about, well, I had a friend back. If not, well, I didn't have much left to lose, now did I?

"Well then," Camicazi's grin returned, a little bright than usual, like the sun in a clouded day. "Let's go see our friends."

* * *

><p>Because of what happens in the next two chapters, I require a full chapter dedicated to one of the two brothers, Toothless or Hiccup, uninterrupted. I am asking you, the viewers which scenarios you'd like to see first: Toothless's escape from New Outcast Island or Hiccup's battle against the King's dragons.

The vote does not change the outcome, only decides which comes **_first**_. **The winner of the pool gets their chapter written out and posted first, while the other is delayed. **

Edit: Yes, Skullcrusher is who you think he is. Also, Hookfang's sister, well, let's just say some of you might be able to guess who she is.

20. Chapter 20

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Well, Hiccup got first pick by a landslide. Thank you all for leaving your votes. Maybe I should do more votes more oftenâ€¦| Voting on having voting? Maybe not for everything, if I ever did that.

And wow, that'sâ€¦| a new record over 8k words in under 3 days. Man, topping it with Toothless's stuff is going to be hard.

Anyways hope you enjoy and tell me what you thought of this chapter.

* * *

><p>I'll admit, there were times that I just wanted to look at Astrid, to spend as much of my time just staring at everything she did. I liked how she looked, especially the very way her golden locks fell on her head and how her blue eyes just always had this vibrant glow. I mean, she wasn't named 'beautiful' to be ironic or to scare troll just like how most Vikings were; if anything I felt it was an understatement.<p>

Now, I looked at her for completely different reasons. She didn't have beautiful golden hair or vibrant blue eyes anymore; instead to be replaced by bone white spines and glowing silvery spheres. Astrid was completely in a Nadder's body now, that much was painfully obvious to me, but it was those two things that caught my attention the most. Her body was as blue as the ocean, in stark contrast to the daylight skyblue most Nadders seemed to sport. The membranes of her wings were a dark, yet shining, almost golden color, in difference to the plain yellow many other Nadders had. Astrid was still beautiful in my eyes, but now she had a different sort of beautyâ€¦| and I wasn't sure what I felt about it.

"Stop looking at me!" she barked out at me.

I turned away abruptly, still unsure of what I was feeling other than a hint of embarrassment. "Uh, sorry!" I said to her. "I'mâ€¦ justâ€¦" I tried to stutter, but the words would not leave my mouth.

"Worried," Astrid said as if she was annoyed. "I'm perfectly fine, Hiccup! You don't have to worry about me!"

"But, I mean, you'reâ€¦"

"Different," Astrid answered for me, yet again."

"But doesn't it-"

"It doesn't bother me, really!" Astrid must have gotten the King's mind reading powers or something, because she knew the questions I should have asked better than I did.

"If you're sureâ€¦" It hasn't even been an hour yet since the King literally burned away every bit of Astrid's human form and I still couldn't fully understand why she let him do that. In fact given the looks Astrid was getting from literally _every dragon _around us, I was going to wager that everyone was wondering the same thing. I had the benefit of knowing she going to completely turn into a Nadder, _eventually, _but I couldn't have fathomed she would make such an abrupt choiceâ€¦ Did she really care about helping me that much? I hoped that was true, because it just felt so strange how well she adjusted in such a short amount of time.

"And you stop looking at me!" Astrid yelled again, this time at the Nightmare who stood next to me. She pretty much did that to everyone, since plenty of the dragons were very curious about the 'beast that became a person' before their eyes. The King, probably out of respect, never bothered to directly shine a light of truth on the matter, but that just made the dragons more curious.

"Uh, sorry!" said Snotlout, sounding every bit as awkward as I just did. If there was anything Snotlout and I ever agreed upon, it was Astrid. Yet, for some reason, Snotlout did seem oddly intent at looking at Hookfang's sister. Hookfang did his best to keep hisâ€¦ liege from doing that, making all sorts of requests and promises that got outright ignored.

Shoving my thoughts about Astrid out of my mind for a moment, I took a glance at the other three dragons at the opposite end of the cavern. Taking a peek downwards, I could see the King, almost appearing the size of a normal dragon from this distance. And all around the cave were all of the assembled dragons, both those belonging to the King or otherwise, all gathered to watch the upcoming fight. Apparently, it was tradition for certain events to begin with both groups gathered at opposite ends of the dormant volcano's midsection, which oddly enough did _not _make me feel the least bit comforted. All it accomplished was remind me of the Kill Ring back home, about how it was tradition to host pretty much every sporting event on Berk thereâ€¦ and about all my failures.

Mom's approaching footsteps freed me from those thoughts. "Are you ready?" Only to send me back into them.

"No!" I admitted quite plainly. I hated that I was forced to fight, but it was the only way, the only way I could fix my family, to do something _right._ And yet, there was a very real chance that in order for me to do that, I would have had to _ruin somebody else's _family. With all of the dragons around me shouting "death combat" earlier, I had to wonder if it was also another requirement.

"You don't have to kill them you know," Mom told me, like she knew what was bothering me. Then, frowning on it, she said in a more sheepish tone, "Though admittedly, you would not be penalized for any fatalities that happen in this challenge."

"Oh, great, that makes me feel so much better!" I spat with as much feigned enthusiasm as I could. What if I killed Hookfang's sister, would he look at me the same way again? That Changewing did not seem that much older than me, what would his or was it her parents think about that? And Skullcrusher was fully grown and was definitely in the closest thing dragons had to an upperclass, I seriously doubted he didn't father at least _some _children.

Mom instantly picked up on that and flicked her tail at my nose. If there was some sort of social cue that dragons had involving their tails, I did not have any clue what Mom was trying to say. She then frowned at me, realizing I didn't know. "Honestly," she sighed. "Didn't your father at least teach you to handle challenges? They're not all that different, you know!"

"Sorry! I was a little busy with other priorities!" I didn't sound sorry though; infact, I was trying to suppress a little chuckle once I remembered what I spent most of my time on back before all this 'turning-into-dragons' business started.

"I suppose I at least managed to teach you to be dedicated!" Mom got the little in-joke. Her face contorted into a little toothless grin, the first I ever seen it from her. It looked a little out of place, a little silly on a Night Fury's head, but at the same time, it reaffirmed that Mom did at least care about me. It was a strange and surreal experience to laugh off at trying to murder my Mom, but we still managed to do it.

"Dead Wings!" Astrid's voice called out to Mom by her dragon name. "What do you know of these Kin?" she asked, making the right substitutions for words missing in the dragon tongue.

"Especially the Nightmare?" Snotlout chimed in.

"The first two are youths, not noteworthy enough for me to know too much," Mom told us, shaking her head. "But, I know Skullcrusher very well, enough that it might give you an advantage."

"Uh, you do?" That surprised me. I doubt I even seen what kind of dragon he was even in _The Book of Dragon_, yet apparently Mom knew him.

"He is a Rumblehorn, a Breed normally seen more commonly in the lush forests of the Southeast," Mom said. "They are strong and hardy Kin, by nature; Skullcrusher is no exception, but he is more than what is normal for his breed. He a cunning warrior, with teeth and wit sharp enough to once serve a Knight for the King."

Whatever worries I had about killing him had suddenly disappeared; now I was more worried what he could do to _me and my friends._ It's no wonder the other dragons had no objections to having him challenge me. "Uhâ€¦ does he have have any special powers? Any gifts?" I asked. If he had served as a Knight was, chances were that maybe he was reputable enough to earn a gift of some sort.

Mom shook her head. "Not that I know of. He retired from the service back when I was still struggling with my own Squireship. Regardless of whether not he does possess any such power, I recommend you dispose of his allies before focusing on him, though I imagine they will not allow you that choice."

Astrid nodded her spikehead, considering my Mom's plans; I still couldn't shake the thought that this was the person I had been, well, crushing on since I was I five. "A Kin large as he is doesn't seem very agile, especially in the air."

Mom nodded in confirmation. "Speed may not be his Breed's advantage, but take care not to get hit. As far as I am aware, it is something of a coming of age test for Rumblehorn youths to shatter stones with their faces."

"Great, Skullcrusher can probably relate to Dad," I said with much irony. I suppose if my chances for making it out this alive were still going down, I might as well poke fun at it.

"I know I already like him!" declared Snotlout.

Before we could discuss the matter even further, a loud booming voice echoed throughout the whole cavern. "**My Kin, I call for your undivided attention." **And with a single sentence, all other conversation suddenly stopped, the King had everyone, even me, looking down below at him. "**Before our combatants fight, I would like to reiterate the rules."**

I approached edge of the ledge and gave the large dragon a nod. Though I doubted he really need my approval, it still gave me a little piece of mind to do so. My friends and the other dragons opposite of us did the same.

"**The rules of the challenge are simple. The challenged... **_**Hiccup **_**has opted for a three-on-three fight. The whole of the island is the battleground with no restrictions on mobility or time, save that you do not stray too far away my Domain; those who do, either by their own will or otherwise, are disqualified. The winning team will be declared when all other combatants on the opposing side are either incapacitated or otherwise removed from combat. The slaying of any foes will not be penalized."**

I nodded at the King's words, feeling grateful for the lack of time restrictions and the wide open space we have been given, especially since it gave my team even more advantages. More space meant more room to maneuver in, perfect for a fast and agile Night Fury and more time meant more time to recover from our wounds. I mean, Astrid, Snotlout, and I _still _had the power to heal rapidly; it wasn't like completely turning into dragons stopped that.

"**And let me make this abundantly clear, while it is permitted for others to follow the fighting, under no circumstances will****outside

interference of any sort will be tolerated; stay in the sidelines if you wish to see tomorrow!" **My friends and I didn't seem to get that, but Hookfang, Mom and the other dragons sure did. They all nodded their heads as if the matter was that grave. **"Now then, do the combatants have any last words?"**

"Yes, I do!" shouted Hookfang's sister. "I want my enemies to know that after this day I will have my own name."

"As will I," boasted the Changewing.

"Ooh, maybe you'll get something cool like Fire or maybe Frost..." Snotlout tried to suggest names, but it was clear he was lacking ideas.

Astrid stared at Snotlout as if wondering what was going on in his head. "I can't believe I am saying this, but Snotlout, can you please stop flirting with the enemy?"

"Uh, I'm not flirting!" Snotlout said. And then he corrected himself when he turned back to Hookfang's sister. "Uh unless you're okay with that?"

Astrid just rolled her eyes and I didn't blame her.

The lone Rumblehorn in the room gave us all an amused grin, as if the level of dysfunction my team had was a indicator of how the fight was going to turn out; I really hope that that was not the case. "So, it's been a while since I've had the chance to face a Night Fury" said Skullcrusher, likely referring to fighting Mom way back when. "I am going to enjoy it."

"I'm not!" I declared, feeling my confidence against someone who fought a Night Fury before wane. Even if that fight ended up in a loss, that was still experience against my kind of dragon and I had no idea how Rumblehorns were supposed to fight.

Skullcrusher gave a hearty laugh that should have been less frightening than it was, like he was boasting about how thoroughly outclassed I was. Maybe if I was lucky, I could make him laugh himself to death with how incompetent I was. I mean, surely the irony of the King saying how 'worthy' _I _was had to have been some sort of deadly joke. "We'll see, Night Fury, we will see."

"Hiccup," my Mom whispered in my ear. "Remember, you have the advantage at range; not let him near you."

I nodded, figuring out pretty much the same thing. Night Furies were not exactly known for their close combat abilities.

With the last bits of precombat bantering over, Mom and Hookfang both left the platform my team was on to join the audience.

And then, with a voice that could probably be heard on the other side of Midgard, the King spoke, **"Combatants, you may begin!"**

We all sprung into action, taking leaps into the air. "Out of the nest!" I shouted to my teammates as I attempted to soar my way to the opening at the top.. "We need to move into the open skies!"

I was the fastest of all those involved, making me the first one to escape the volcano's mouth, only to just barely avoid getting hit by a lance of fire. Hookfang's sister was right behind me, surprisingly fast for a large dragon.

"Gotcha!" she bellowed. "Now I'll-" but then she was abruptly cut off when a the dark sea blue shape of Astrid slammed into her.

Taking advantage of the reprieve Astrid gave me, I flew as high into the skies as I could, taking my Mom's words to heart. I've learned again and again that lived in a world where my opponents were better at me when it came to fighting up close. That was fine, especially since I knew I had I also lived in a world where I could break cliffsides if I tried hard enough. A blast of plasma, intentionally missing Hookfang's sister, but leaving her open for a few vital seconds.

Her massive taloned feet extended, the deep blue Nadder slammed both of them into the Nightmare's side, grazing scale before following up with a short range beam of heat that would have connected if the Nightmare did not shift her head to the left.

She gracefully evade a ball of corrosive acid from the Changewing and then sent volley of poisonous spines her way.

Astrid seemed almost like a natural at flying, as if she had been preparing for it. She was so good infact, it was like she skipped over the awkward phase entirely, unlike Snotlout and myself when we were still getting used to our bodies. I guess I really shouldn't be surprised she was already doing things that could only be described as 'close combat air acrobatics'; this was Astrid after all.

While she was able to predict, the movements of the other two dragons, neither she nor I had anticipated Skullcrusher's move until it happened. A burning shape that reminded me vaguely of a spear came barreling toward Astrid. She barely had enough time to realize what had happened before she was sent tumbling out of the skies.

"Astrid!" I screamed.

Skullcrusher then dove in after Astrid, his massive horns pointed right at her.

I made my move, diving in after the falling Nadder, hoping to beat the massive dragon with my distinct speed advantage.

It wasn't until the the Rumblehorn and I took a glance at each other, just barely side by side that I realized I fell in for a trap. The dragon changed directions entirely and slammed his heavy feet into my side, causing me to wave. I wanted to unleash my Breath and send a plasma blast into his side in response, but that was risky and likely going to miss at this distance. For my lack of daring, I paid with several repeated kicks to my ribs, each one driving me further and further off course. It was a good thing I had my saddle on, because that extra layer probably took most of the beating for me.

It was only after I had slowed down enough to fall behind Skullcrusher that I noticed just how far Astrid was away from me, still dazed, still at risk of falling to her doom.

I leapt into action, hoping to against all odds that I could rescue the falling Nadder.

Skullcrusher was still in my way, ready to block me at a moment's notice. "Back, again?" he taunted me. "You can't take me _and _save her!"

I smirked. "I don't have to."

And at that, Snotlout swooped in completely catching the large dragon off guard and delivering a fiery tackle, his body blazing. "That's for hurting my girl!" he bellowed aloud.

With the opening my cousin bought for me, I dived in after Astrid again. Only this time, I managed to grab onto her with my paws. "Hang on!" I shouted, stretching my wings to my limit and bringing as much wind as I could to slow down the descent, all just in time for both of us to plunge through a snow frosted canopy.

I don't remember much about what happened after that, but I remember crashing. I think on the way down from the heavens, I felt myself getting battered by dozens of tree branches that were unfortunately in our way. Pain shot through my body, but I think I did more harm to tree than they did to me; those branches more often than not ended snapping off their then before I knew it, I found my head somehow stuck in a mound of snow.

I pulled my head out and shook whatever frost that clung to my body.

Astrid had apparently pulled herself together faster than I did, so when I managed to free myself, I found her standing next to me. "Ugh, my head hurts," she groaned.

"My everything hurts," I told her, a slightly pained expression on my face. I felt like a dozen yaks sat on top of me back when I saw an ordinary boy, not a pleasant experience. "Anything else you'd like to add?"

She grinned at that statement, though she still looked pain. "Not much, some cuts and bruises." She was correct about that. There didn't appear to be any major injuries, though, I couldn't be sure of things like if she had any broken bones.

Before I could give her an opportunity to check if anything was wrong with me, at least anything that normally wasn't wrong with me, Astrid pounced at me, sending me belly up to the ice cold ground. Just behind her, I saw a glob of green acid zip right where my head used to be.

For a moment, I think we both forgot we were in a fight; because our enemies sure didn't.

Astrid gave a roar of challenge and then shot a jet of fire in arc at some of the trees. "Blast!" she cursed. "I hate Changewings!"

Rolling off my back and into a defensive stance, I vaguely recalled what I knew about that kind of dragon. "The Changewing

invisible?"

Then out of nowhere, I received another bolt of acid. This time it connected and splashed against my sides. I held my jaw tight, forcing the burning pain I felt as far out of my mind as I could. My saddle at least provided me a layer of protection, giving the acid something to eat through before harming me.

"Hiccup!" Astrid shouted. This time, she kicked me to the ground just in time to avoid another gout of acid that came from a completely different direction.

"Ugh, thanks!" I said once the stinging went from being 'unbearably painful' to 'only very painful'. Hopefully it became 'very annoyingly painful' before it did too much damage.

"I'll handle the Changewing!" declared Astrid, her eyes scanning in every direction.

"Great, you do that!" I said as I picked myself up yet again. Granted, that didn't exactly stop me from keeping my eyes ready for any sign of the Changewing or the Rumblehorn.

Up above, I could see that Snotlout and Hookfang's sister were going at it. Though unlike me and Astrid, they apparently seemed to be having fun. The fight seemed to be going evenly, each going at each other with fiery tackles and gouts of flame, yet I could distinctly make out the sound of cheers and wild laughter; they were enjoying themselves, having the time of their lives despite trying to well, hopefully not kill each other.

"I wish I could see where the Changewing's attacking from..." Astrid declared. She dodged two more blobs of acid and returned fire with a flick of her tail spikes, yet to no avail. The whole situation might have been easier if the changewing was careless enough to step in the snow to leave tracks, because right now, neither Astrid or I could really make out the dragon's invisibility. I mean, we've been told to look out for rough shapes of dragons, when this happened, but that was easier said than-

It was at that point I realized something important. I made a high pitch call, the kind that was barely even audible to human ears. Astrid gave me a look. "Just what was that?"

By the time she asked that question, the sounds I had made returned to my ears causing them to wiggle slightly. Suddenly, the Changewing's invisibility was a nonfactor. Echolocation let me know exactly where the Changewing was. I aimed a plasma blast at a nearby tree, but it didn't connect.

Instead, the pinkish red body of a dragon flickered into existence and attempted to escape my attack, only to be blown back into a sheet of snow.

With the white frost coating the Changewing, Astrid easily saw the no-long invisible dragon. She leapt forward and pinned the dragon to the ground with her massive talons. "You give up yet?" she said, her mouth pointed at the dragon's head with a very clear and obvious threat to melt it off.

"Uh, Astrid, that might be a little-"

"I yield!" shouted the dragon, much to my relief. "Don't shoot!"

I took a sigh, feeling glad that we've managed to defeat one of the dragons already. Maybe we had a chance in this after all.

"Look out!" I heard coming from above. On second thought, we didn't. Snotlout came swooping down at us, barely managing to avoid getting blasted apart by a fiery spear. He landed onto the ground and tried to take refuge behind a tall pine, probably thinking he was not big enough to consider it a toothpick.

While Astrid and I dealt with the Changewing, it was clear that Skullcrusher decided his time was best spent breaking the stalemate between the two Nightmares ones.

Skullcrusher looked at the Changewing with a frown, clearly knowing that the dragon could no longer fight back. "Let him go, he is no longer a combatant since he yeilded," he said.

Astrid unpinned the Changewing and the dragon flew off into the woods.

"Hmph three-on-two, more glory for us!" declared the female Nightmare.

Skullcrusher gave a snort. "Yes, I suppose," he saidâ€| though I couldn't make sure if he sounded bitter about it.

The large dragon then lunged at me and Astrid. We both managed to evade a direct hit letting him hit the floor but the force of his impact was still enough to send us back a few yards. If there was any doubt about Skullcrusher's strength, those thoughts immediately were dispelled.

"Okay that might be a problem," muttered Astrid. It's no wonder even Snotlout was afraid to face him. Skullcrusher picked himself out of the snow, apparently unhurt from just charging his whole body into the ground. In fact, I think the very ground itself took more damage than he did.

"Hey! What about him?" Hookfang's sister yelled while looked at my hiding cousin.

And then, as if taking the suggestion seriously, Skullcrusher charged through the tree my cousin hid behind. The tree broke in half! Snotlout found himself getting pushed aside like a rag doll. My cousin tried to break himself from the Rumblehorn, but he was still being pushed back.

Astrid I panicked and unloaded at the green clad dragon with everything we had and all we seemed to managed to do was daze him enough to slow down. Plasma blasts and cutting beams of heat were _not _enough!

And things continued to get worse. Hookfang's sister apparently didn't like the fact she wasn't getting the attention. "Don't forget about me!" snapped the other Nightmare as she lunged forth, making a strafing run at me and Astrid forcing us to break our attack on

Skullcrusher.

"Argh!" growled Astrid. "Why do we have to keep fighting enemies we can't seriously hurt!"

"It's a conspiracy!" I jokingly complained. At least Alvin had the decency to get hurt or show signs of damage whenever we get him a beating, it's just that he could just recover from his injuries fast; Skullcrusher was a whole different sort of unfairness, the kind where I had the feeling we might as well have been using pillows for all the damage we were doing.

One thing was for sure, we were not going to be able to take on both Hookfang's sister and a retired Knight at the same time—we| but we didn't have to do that did we?

Deciding to abandon my Mom's instruction to stay as far away from my enemy as possible, I tackled the large Rumblehorn breaking Snotlout free. "Take on the Nightmare!" I shouted at my cousin. He looked at me blankly. "Just do it!"

Thankfully, I didn't have to repeat myself again. Hookfang's sister apparently agreed with my sentiments and she dropped out of the sky to tackle Snotlout. They rolled off, becoming fiery wheel that tumbled off into the distance behind me.

Skullcrusher, angered by my interference, took action and lunged at me with his massive horns.

I evaded that attack before it could chop me in half. The tree next to me wasn't so fortunate.

"Hiccup, what are you doing!?" Astrid shouted as she kept throwing whatever she had at the large dragon.

Skullcrusher's attention diverted to her, but I made him regret taking his eyes off me. I took a cheap shot and slugged the adult dragon like I would if I was a boxer. "Over here ugly!" I bellowed and took to the sky. Skullcrusher flared his nostrils and then flew after me.

"Hiccup!" Astrid shouted, taking off as well.

"Stay back!" I said to her.

"Yes, stay out of this!" Skullcrusher agreed before sending Astrid a flaming projectile. She dodged it by hiding in the shadow of a tall pine tree and countered with a volley of spikes.

"I'm not!"

"Help Snotlout!" I said to her. "This is between him—we| and me!" Hesitantly, Astrid gave me a nod. She stopped flying beside us and turned completely around. Good, then I think this little plan of my mine could work. Snotlout was an even match against Hookfang's sister, sending Astrid was definitely going to break the stalemate in our team's favor. Now all I had to do to make sure my team won was to make sure I had Skullcrusher's undivided attention.

"Hmph, so we are alone!" bellowed Skullcrusher.

"We are!" The Rumblehorn almost hit me with one of his fiery projectiles, but I avoided it by climbing higher, over the trees. Then to make sure he wasn't going to have any second thoughts about following me, I blasted him with one of my last plasma shot.

He didn't so much as flinch or dodge, instead opting to just take the hit and keep flying as if nothing happened. "You think that's what it'll take to beat me?" he sounded so confident that I worried for a moment he was about to look back.

"Yes!" I said, trying to sound as confident as he did. Maybe that could distract him, anything. It wasn't long before I found myself flying over the frosted over beach and then the icy fields around the island; Skullcrusher was still right behind me, still trying to hit me, but to no avail. So far so good.

And then the unexpected happened. Suddenly, the dragon behind me pulled a burst of surprising speed and came barreling right at me. I didn't have enough time to react to that and suddenly found myself being tackled to the ground from the air—except there was no ground where we were flying over.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, I found myself land the top of one of those sea stacks that dotted Helheim's Gate. I fell on my back, dazed from the impact, allowing Skullcrusher to pin me down with ease. The Rumblehorn dragged me a bit closer to the edge, just enough I could see the drop below. "Do you have any last words?"

I regained just enough of my senses in order for me to say what I felt I should say in the situation I was in. "Yeah, I win!"

Strangely the Rumblehorn didn't seem all too displeased by my statement. "That you do," he sounded almost amused. In fact, I think he could compete with the King for amused looked that creeped me out. "Tell me, kid, do you think I fell for your little ploy—or did you fall for mine?"

My heart sank. Suddenly I remembered what Mom said about his wits being sharp as his teeth. "But—the challenge is over!" Or at least for the two of us. I seriously doubted Snotlout and Astrid would have any problems facing Hookfang's sister.

"That it is," confirmed Skullcrusher. "No doubt you thought enough about the win conditions before you did this plan."

Fearful for being thrown off the sea stack, I nodded my head. "The challenge is to see whether or not I'd receive the King's power," I explained. "Because my team won, or is going to win no matter what, I can resume."

"Yes, that is correct. I suppose some jealous and overly rules minded Kin will try to say otherwise, but the default is that you would keep learning your power." Then, Skullcrusher gave me an expression of malicious glee. "But did you ever think of how this plan could go wrong?"

I nodded my head again, this time with a little more hesitation. Looking at the frozen sea below me, I almost felt like I was about to

go down there in a very violent and messy manner. "I could die and never receive that power, even if my team won."

"And I could easily do that right now." For a moment, I thought he was about to throw me down. Instead, he did something entirely unexpected. He dragged my body away from the edge and unpinned me, "But I won't. I will not kill you, kid."

"You'reâ€¦ letting me go?"

Skullcrusher burst into hearty belly laugh. "I may like fighting and challenges, I'm not a callous murderer! The challenge is won and you should be proud of that!"

"Uh, thank youâ€¦" I said awkwardly as I stood to my feet. At the same time, I realized something about this whole thing bothered me, "Youâ€¦ let me win?" Because if he really saw through my plan, he had no reason to go after.

Skullcrusher suppressed his laughter. Then, more solemnly, he told me, "Because this could have been my only chance to tell you what I need to say." He then turned his gaze to the island in the distance, covered just barely under a wall of fog. "Tell me, kid, did you know the King has the power to see all on his island?"

"Not really," I admitted. I've been wondering how the King could do certain things, like know where Mom was despite not being able to leave his prison. The power to see everything on his island explained that away quite nicely.

"Well, over here, we're close enough to the island to still fly back without having to navigate our way, but far enough away that the King cannot know of anything we do or _say_ here," he said, special emphasis on 'say'.

And then I understood why he let me win. "You want to say something to me."

Skullcrusher nodded. "The King is not to be trusted. His deals and his actions seem fair, but that is merely a facade. In truth, we may be his kin, but we are still disposable assets before his eyes."

"Wait, what?" I could not believe what I was hearing. Pretty much every dragon I had _ever_ known more or less trusted and served the King. It seems so prevalent, so all encompassing of what I knew about dragons that I thought that it was just only natural for them to trust him. The idea that even a single dragon would not trust the King almost seemedâ€¦ unreal.

Skullcrusher glowered at me, "Tell kid, what did you do to earn this power?"

"I flew in and demanded that the King helped meâ€¦ and he did," I said aloud, a small hint of perplexed doubt sinking its way into my heart. Did I really deserve the power to change ?

The Rumblehorn nodded at my words as if he was expecting it. "Doesn't that seem odd to you? Surely even one potentially as gifted as you would understand that service to the King comes before power. Even

your mother has spent years before earning enough prestige to acquire her first gift..."

I nodded my head. That was the default, the way all dragons were supposed to earn it. What made me different? "Thenâ€¦ why help me?"

"He wants you to do something with that power, perhaps even what you desired it for to begin with it, whatever that is," said Skullcrusher, shaking his head. "Perhaps, the reason is benign, something unimportant and completely harmless. Yet if it was, why would he go out of his way to give you a situation where you cannot lose in?"

"Butâ€¦ I couldn't beat you!" I said.

"And you did so anyways," said Skullcrusher. "The King deliberately set you against two barely trained novices when there were several who were your senior."

At the other dragon's words, I couldn't help but wonder if maybe those were the reason there were no time and space limitations other than it be on the island. After all, those favored me way more than Skullcrusher since I had better flying ability and could quickly recover from injuries. And that's not counting the special permission I had to come and go as I pleased. "Thenâ€¦ why send you?"

"Because the King knows I would never kill you, not intentionally anyways. You're too important to whatever he's planning and I know better than to directly endanger myself by hurting you," said the Rumblehorn. "Listen to me, kid, the only reason I'm letting you win this, the only reason that we're even here, is because I'm being nice and warning you so you can make the right choice and back out!"

Something told me that the reason Skullcrusher got his name was _not _because his jaws were strong enough to crack open bones. His argument definitely made sense. The King probably _did _want me to do use the power he would bestow upon me to get Mom back home to Berk. I didn't know the reason behind it, but I had the feeling that if Skullcrusher was rightâ€¦ I shook my head, immediately closing that line of thinking behind an imaginary door. "No," I shook my head. "I've got to do thisâ€¦"

The Rumblehorn shook his head. "Suit yourself, kid, I ain't gonna stop you. Just never say I didn't warn you!" And with that, the other dragon flew off into the distance, heading back to the King's domain.

I sat there for a moment, wondering if maybe I should heed the dragon's words more carefully. I mean, power had a price to it, just what was the price set on the power I desired?

I took my mind off of those thoughts and instead focused on what really mattered here; I could finally fix everything. Was the King really going to crush that dream? Today, maybe as early as tomorrow morning, I could at least prove to myself and my family I did something _right._

With those thoughts in mind, I decided to head back and claim my

prize. Taking flight, it didn't take long before I entered the dragon nest and flown down to the lowest platforms reserved normally for the Knights.

The people I knew were there, Mom, Snotlout, Astrid, Hookfang, and even my opponents.

Skullcrusher stayed silent but gave me a nod of approval, as if saying that he respected my decision even though he didn't like it.

The Changewing couldn't look at me, probably embarrassed that I was the one who led to his, er, her, whatever, downfall.

Hookfang's sister laying next to her brother, wounded in several places, but still breathing and alive.

Astrid and Snotlout both greeted me with wild grins on their faces. Neither of them appeared injured, but that was only because if they had taken any wounds, they would have sealed up by now; I could still make out the faint traces of dried up blood that still clung to their scales.

"**So the victor has returned to us to claim his prize," **said the King. While I had grown accustomed to meeting the utterly massive dragon in the past few days, this time, I couldn't help but feel a little apprehensive having him focus his entire attention upon me.

"The power should not go to him!" complained one of the dragons above. "He lost! Give it to the _real victors!_" Other dragons seemed to agree with him.

Snotlout was about to step up and agree, but all Astrid to do was kill that thought by staring at the Nightmare.

"**The conditions that he continued to learn were that his team be victorious. Since his allies disposed of the remaining opposition, even though he is technically disqualified, he is still awarded that powerâ€¦|" **said the King, his words silencing the dissenters. That more or less confirmed what I was thinking of how the rules worked earlier. "**Assuming of course, he still accepts it!"**

I looked over at Mom and Astrid, both gave me approving nods, telling me to step forward. But at the same time, I couldn't help but recall a certain Rumblehorn's words echoing through my head as if it never left. Did I really want to have a being like him entering my head? But even with all my hesitation, I still stepped forward; I still had something I needed to do. "I'm ready to continue!" I declared.

And then the vision started. I found myself buried under a mountain of snow for the thousandth time in a row. I wanted to scream and dig myself out, again for the thousandth time, but this time I knew what I had to do, why I had to stay put.

I let myself stay there, trapped and unmoving. Every part of my body, my heart, my lungs, my limbs all became consumed by cold, as if I was slowly becoming a giant Hiccup-icle while still being conscious of the fact... and that was what I needed to do.

The vision faded and I found myself looking at the massive jaws of the King. **"Excellent,"** **he** said the the King, with great enthusiam. **"You understand."**

I nodded. Now all I had to do was make the runes and- "Wait, what about-" Then, a pain, no, something, an odd sensation that was like pain, yet was clearly not shot up through my left arm. My claws glowed and shimmered with a faint, golden light, almost like the sun had somehow managed to get stuck on my paw. Perhaps even stranger, I immediately became aware of what it was and what it was supposed to be used for. The light died down, once I figured out how to stop it.

"That is the means to employ the power you have gained," **he** said the King. **"For what good is knowledge without the power to use it?"**

"Well, thanks," I said without irony. It was just like me to forget something so important, so vital. I guess if there was any gift any other power I needed to have, it was what I just received.

There were murmurs of the crowd, even among my friends over what I had just received.. Well, at least among my friends, they'd know about it soon enough.

"So[^] what was that about?" questioned Astrid.

I gave her a contented grin. "You'll see!" I cheered, feeling giddy for the first time since Toothless left.

I then took off, receiving cheers and congratulations from several other dragons as I exited the dragon nest. My friends and family followed behind me. Mom then led us back to her den, a place of privacy, a place where only those we trusted could be allowed to witness what I was about to do.

"I still wish your sister could come here, Hookfang!" declared Snotlout as we landed by the entrance.

"No! I absolutely forbid it!" shouted the other Nightmare.

"Aw, but why not? She was awesome!"

Mom didn't lead them inside, since they erupted into a sort of argument over the other Nightmare. It was surprisingly roomy for a cave "I take it[^] you've received what you wanted?" Mom questioned me.

I nodded and took off my saddle. After today's events, it was badly damaged by acid, fire, and physical damage, leaving it a withered husk of what it originally had been. It barely had enough of itself to still cling to my body and with my teeth I tore the last of those apart. It was fine with me to destroy it, because after today, I wouldn't need it anymore.

My left paw flared with that same soft golden light it did almost an hour ago..

"So, what is it?" questioned Astrid. It was clearly magical.

I didn't exactly know I wanted to say it, mostly because the words for the concepts didn't exist to dragons, so I just let my actions speak for me. I brought it to my heart and then.

Mom and Astrid both looked surprised. "Wait, is that--"

"Yup! It sure is!" I declared. The King of dragons, a powerful force of nature used his vast and possibly endless powers of magic to give me a pen. A magic pen, boy was that something for the bards to sing about. Oh let us sing the Ballad of Hiccup, the Night Fury who asks a god for a pen!

I silently prayed to Odin, hoping that he was feeling merciful enough to aid me as he did all those months ago. I might have had one godlike being backing me, but just incase, I felt like I needed another.

As I thought of my intentions, symbols flashed inside my mind before they came golden runes that were written over my chest. And with each letter, I thought of the effect I was going to create, the thought of the magic that ran through me was being buried under Winter's sheer cold. Astrid and Mom looked at me intently, gaping in awe of what I was doing right in front of them.

With each little symbol I wrote, the larger the world around me seemed to become. When were both dragons, I was slightly larger than Astrid and only a foot shorter than Mom was, but that was changing right before my eyes. I felt my scales soften, becoming lighter, pinkish skin. My wings and tail the things I had valued the most for flying slowly shriveled away into nothing.

And when my writing was done, I collapsed to the ground into a heap. I tried to push myself up, to bring myself forward. I felt so weak, my limbs lost whatever strength they had as a dragon, becoming as slim and frail as I remembered them. Lifting my hand to my temples, I felt that I had hair at the back of my head for the first time in months!

Everything about me had changed back to how I was before I brewed the potion that started my descent into dragon hood. I didn't even have the enhanced strength that I had when I took that first sip, but that was the price of being human. After all these months, I had finally come back to how I should be.

I shivered, my teeth rattled. I no longer had the protection of large thick scales or an internal hearth to provide me warmth. And yet, I didn't hate it, I didn't fear it; for once in my life, I liked being cold. It made me realize just how small and weak I had truly become.

With a burst of strength from my tender arms, I picked myself up, showing myself to the two dragons in the room.

"But how?" Mom gaped in awe.

"But, the King said that you couldn't break the spell," Astrid spoke, also stunned.

I laughed; it almost sounded like I was making a high pitch squeal compared to the noises I made as a Night Fury. I still understood

them perfectly, despite the fact I was no longer covered in scales. "I didn't have toâ€¦" I said. It felt strange speaking Norse again, but I welcomed it. My voice though really sounded so hitch pitched...

Mom and Astrid both looked at me confused, not understanding me. Of course what I did just say made no sense.

"I'm still cursed," I said. "It's justâ€¦ not working right now." I pointed to the strange set of symbols that formed a circle over my heart. a seal the kept the potion's magic suppressed. I didn't know what the each them stood for, but that's what I had the King helped me make. It was too difficult, beyond me to completely undo any of the two or three different curses that plagued Berk at this point. So I thought maybe the best way to deal with them was to disable them, render them effectively non-functional. Hopefully that was understood.

Mom smiled at me. Faintly, I wondered what she'd look like, underneath those scales. Well, there was only one way to find out. And then, she burst out laughing.

Before I realized what was happening, Astrid did so first, turning her head away and then pretending I didn't exist.

It was then I realized what the problem was. Great, Hiccup, the most important moment of your life with the two most important lies in your and you forget the most important detail. I hid behind my saddle and began rummaging through the pockets. Good thing I packed extra tunics.

* * *

><p>I bet all of you are probably reeling by just how muchâ€¦ stuff happened here. We've gone from dread up and down an emotional rollercoaster, up until we've ended on a joke about on the fact clothes don't always transform with their owner.

**I'll be honest, this was a pretty crazy chapter to write for me.
**

Hiccup finally turns human, again, but at the same time, there's the whole issue of the King to deal with. Makes one wonder why Skullcrusher stopped being a Knight; I certainly do.

And yes, Skullcrusher is from the second movie.

**And Hookfang's sister is not Fanghook, but she's based on someone else in the franchise. Maybe you'll figure out who. **

Boy, hopefully, Toothless's chapter can live up to the bar set up by this one.

21. Chapter 21

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

**Well, I am definitely getting better at posting stuff, enough that

I was able to post this one only a few days after the last one, but man this chapter gave me such a beating. Sorry this came after Hiccup's snippet to those of you who wanted to see Toothless's story more, I hope this was worth the wait. **

Anyways, this comes just in time for the weekend. Enjoy and if you like this chapter, please leave a comment explaining your favorite parts and ways I could improve upon it.

* * *

><p>It would be so much easier to trust Camicazi if I didn't feel like she was trying to kill me. I mean, how else would I explain why we were going here of all places? It was practically suicide to stand next to her!<p>

"Quiet, Toothless. You're going to give us a way if you keep at it like that," the Bog Burglar whispered, raising her index finger to her lips.

"Itâ€™|Isâ€™| Coldâ€™|" I shivered.

Camicazi rolled her eyes, as if I was stating a plainly obvious fact. "You think?" She turned her gaze to the sky as if to make a point. Snow fell gently overhead, coating the ground and the nearby roofs with sheets of white. Outside, out here, I started to regret not bringing other means of keeping myself warm.

I gritted my teeth, wanting to be angry at her for something other than the fact she had us all imprisoned for a week. She just had to take my friends from the nice and relatively warmer caves Alvin liked to keep for a headquarters. Honestly, I think I'd rather be stuck in those dark, dank caves if it didn't mean having to stand in the frigid, bone chilling air. I might gotten used to the fact my body was no longer naturally able to endure Winter's cold, but I still needed at least some form of protection from the elements; a simple tunic was not going to be enough. I really wish I didn't leave my jacket with Stormfly, but she needed it...

The Bog Burglar quietly leaned close to one of the shoddy and rundown shacks. He placed her ear against it, listening in. "Three, maybe four," she said. There weren't many people on the surface, since they probably had better sense than I did and stayed in doors. For much of the time, the only traces of human life were the dozens or hundreds of foot steps that scattered off every directionâ€™| which conveniently hid our own tracks.

"Threeâ€™| Outcasts...?" I shivered, wishing I had a sword or crossbow my side. That would have made trusting Camicazi much easier...

Surprisingly, Camicazi shook her head. "Not Outcasts."

"Butâ€™| they serve Alvin."

"Not because they're of the Outcast Tribe," Camicazi spoke seriously.

That actually got my attention. If they weren't Outcasts, then why did they work for Alvin? They weren't in cages, so I doubted they

were slaves, but then againâ€¦ their homes weren't exactly the best for keeping warm. I mean, they looked so small, how could they even fit a hearth inside?

Before I could think on that more, Camicazi gave me a grin and pulled me forward. She then kicked open a door to one of the nearby shacks and then threw me inside. Then, she slammed the door shut. "Stay here," I heard her say.

Turning around, I found there was no one or anything else aside from me in that little run down building, leaving me to wonder what was that all about. Why would Camicazi put me inside hereâ€¦ unlessâ€¦ I leaned closer to the door, just in time to just barely listen into a conversation.

"...must find that boy!" shouted a definitely male voice. "You know what Alvin would do to you if you failed!"

"I honestly wouldn't mind that!" I heard Camicazi chirp, sounding eerily cheerful compared to how serious she was a moment ago.

"You'd probably end up â€¦ Terrible Terror or some other small kind of dragon!" said another man.

"Hm, that still wouldn't be too bad. Being so small would let me sneak better!" said Camicazi. "... Well, unless I turn purple or something, then well, I couldn't be more noticeable!"

The men both groaned with frustration. "Honestly, why doesn't Alvin just get rid of you?"

"Well, I did capture that boy the first time! You wouldn't have had him if it weren't for me!" Camicazi declared so proudly that I wondered if maybe she really didn't regret what she did to us all. I mean, she just sounded so willing to say it.

"Heh and then you'd end up like the others, stuck in those cages down in the holding pen!" declared the more abrasive man.

"...Still beats living out here in the cold," said the other man. I heard the sound of something hitting the ground, making me wonder if one of those goons just hit the other.

"You should really learn to hold your tongue!" said the more easily agitated warrior. "You know that turning into one of _them_ _beasties_ is a curse!"

"Well, I think Alvin sound really be thinking of _encouraging_ it!" declared Camicazi. "I mean, look at what you all did to Berk with only a couple of freshly turned dragons!"

"Quiet you!" hissed the more angered man. "Alvin's made it clear that it's a punishment!"

That got my attention for a moment. I would have figured that the Outcasts who ended up turning into dragons might have been given more status or some measure of prestige, because it gave so many capabilities and advantages above what ordinary humans had. I mean, sure, Outcasts probably didn't have much in the way of Honor even amongst themselves, but I doubted they didn't at least have _some

_way of measuring personal accomplishment or power. Sure there were downsides, but I would have thought that the Outcasts of all Vikings wouldn't be a little more willing to see past them. Part of the reason I am still having a hard time making up my mind about going back to being a Night Fury is because I find it hard to _not _see the value in that sort of power. But here, apparently Outcasts turned into dragons made up some sort of lesser classâ€¦ It made no sense. Why punish your own warriors, especially the ones that can do things like fly and breathe fire?

"Uh, Bellybasher," said the other, more easily frightened man. "The boy?"

"Ugh, right," said the man who was apparently Bellybasher. "You better come with us and help us find the boy, _lueitenant."_

"Oh, speaking of that! While you two were busy _goofing off..._" I heard Camicazi step closer to the door and I felt my heart drop into my legs. "I already went and found him!"

I backed up far away from the door when when I realized what was happening. Hoping for anything that could save my skin, I took a quick glance for any other options that would have kept me alive for just a moment longer, but to no avail. The room was empty save some piles of loose snow that fluttered through the obvious holes in the roof.

The door knob twisted open, letting two large men to step inside the ruined building, both wielding large axes that looked like they could easily behead me. "Well, lookie what we have here!" said Bellybasher.

"Alvin's going to like this!" said the other man.

Right behind the two men was that backstabbing no-good traitor of a Bog Burglar, grinning at me. I hated that treacherous smile of hers; Camicazi set me up, yet again! I should have known better than to trust her, not when she already abused it ones. She diverted me away from friends only to send me to my doom, while making me suffer for it. Now, I was alone up against two oversized brutes! There was no way I could beat them.

Bellybasher stepped forward, bringing his axe over my head. "Now then, Alvin wants you alive, so you better come quietly and-"

I spat in his face before he could finish. I was sick and tired of being pushed around by them. If there really was no hope for my escape, then fine, I'd rather die than serve Alvin like. I just wish I could have saved my friends, most especially Stormfly...

My single act of defiance angered Bellybasher enough to draw the axe's head high up. "Oh, now you done it! Alvin's going to have to settle for your head."

I stepped back all the way to the wall, afraid of getting chopped into pieces, yet at the same time, so willing to just end it then and there.

Then, before Bellybasher swung the axe, I abruptly closed my eyes, flinching before the blow was even swungâ€¦ and it never connected. I

heard a metallic clang as something heavy hit the floor, followed by a slumping noise.

I opened my eyes to find Bellybasher and his axe right on the floor in a heap. Camicazi stood over him, a small club in her hands. "Oh, you thought you were so big and strong ain't ya!" taunted the Bog Burglar at the downed man. Bellybasher was still apparently conscious and tried to get himself off the floor, but Camicazi didn't let him. She slammed her club into him with a very audible thwack, knocking him out cold as the frigid air around us.

The other man turned and looked at Camicazi, fear in his eyes and hands. "You better- Uh- That club down!" said the other man, clearly hesitant and shivering at the thought of what must have been a much smaller girl.

Camicazi simply just grinned. "Gladly!" she declared, throwing the club away, but drawing her sword before it hit the ground. She then lunged at the timid warrior, sending her sword a dozen ways while her taunts attacked her enemy in a different way. "Oh you think you're so good don't ya? Ha, you couldn't even beat a little girl!" The fight couldn't have lasted more than a few seconds, ending only when Camicazi hit the Outcast warrior's head with the pommel of her blade, stunning him just a moment for her to kick him onto the floor. Now the other man was in a groaning heap. "Heh, you better stay down, you look like you could use a rest!" she said cheerily as she also knocked him out with her club.

The whole thing looked so surreal, that I didn't even know what to think anymore. Camicazi betrayed me, so that he betray these other two men and save my life? My head was spinning a dozen different ways and I asked a question I was sure would only make the situation even more confusing, "Wait, are you on my side or not?"

"I think that's the wrong question," Camicazi said so positively. "More accurately, are you on my side?" _I didn't know what she meant by that, but as long as it meant she wasn't going to kill meâ€|

"Right," I said, looking at the two downed me. Immediately, I went over to Bellybasher and stripped him of his large fur cloak and his heavy one-headed axe. Both items were oversized and heavy for me, but it was still better than nothing. It was at this time, realized what Camicazi and I just did. "Wait, so you used me to lure them, so we could mug them?"

Camicazi gave me an almost knowing look. "Well, it's not my fault you escaped without any real equipment," muttered the Bog Burglar. She then burst out into a wide grin, pleased with what had happened. "But still, it's your first official mugging! Maybe we'll make a good Bor Burglar out of you yet!"

"...Don't I have to beâ€| more female for that?"

That only made the girl grin even wider.

We stepped outside of the building, leaving the two unconscious men to themselves.

I felt so much better about our chances now that I actually had some

weaponry and protection; though, I had to cut off a portion of the large cloak to stop it from dragging behind me.

The rest of the journey was mostly uneventful compared to the run in and the subsequent mugging of an Outcast warrior. There were maybe one or two times we could have ended up getting captured, but nothing came of those.

After that, we arrived at our destination. Surprisingly, I recognized the building, the Harbormaster's quarters, just a few yards away from the frozen over harbor. Vaguely, I recalled Camicazi was staring intently at the building at the night of her betrayal, something escape plans. Did that mean she was planning the whole thing? Well, that's one more set of things she's got to answer for.

The other thing I noticed about the building were that instead of the two men who stood watch over the building that day when everything went wrong, there were two women, standing at the the door, looking official. Immediately, I recognized them as two of Camicazi's Bog Burglar 'handmaidens', even though I was pretty sure having some gray hair and some wrinkles might have disqualified them.

Camicazi walked past them just fine, they didn't even so much as acknowledge her existence; but when I tried to do that, I suddenly found myself being lifted upside down by my feet, causing my recently acquired axe and cloak to dangle off the ground. "Camicazi!?" I wailed.

"Sorry!" she apologized. "Put him down, he's fine." They did so, but not before letting me land on my rear. Good thing there was still a layer of snow to soften the fall. Camicazi pulled me up and then we strode inside.

Once we were inside, I immediately found my friends gathered around a table. Fishlegs and Meatlug sat beside each other, each sharing a hand. Next to Meatlug was Stormfly her back positioned right behind me, facing a dark haired girl. Beside the four of them were a small entourage of Bog Burglars, more women of various ages positioned in key points all over the place.

"...be anymore uncooperative!?" said the unknown Bog Burglar girl to Stormfly, apparently already in a conversation before we arrived. She looked around my age, making her the only one of Camicazi's 'handmaidens' to well, actually be a maiden.

"It's hard to cooperate knowing you work for a traitor!" Stormfly barked, raising her bare right hand as if threatening to use it. Stormfly and I were both glad her arm recovered a few days ago. While she apparently still aches and pains within the limb, that was better than losing it entirely. "If I see her again, I'm going to-"

"Going to what?" Camicazi chimed in, making fearful things might have gone worse.

Stormfly turned, her eyes beaming at the Bog Burglar. "_Youâ€|" she hissed with a glare. Her eyes looked around the room, checking the distance of the Bog Burglar warriors nearby before focusing on me. She was dressed in different clothes this time, but she still wore my jacket.

I knew what she was thinking about and I got between the two of them. "Stormfly, please, don't!" I said, gesturing my arms to hopefully tell her to stop.

"So you're siding with her?" Stormfly hissed in a tone I hadn't heard from her in months. After, well, getting to know her, it stung way worse than it ever did back when we were just Squires. Now, I valued her opinion of me.

"No!" I said automatically; I didn't want her to be mad at me, not over something like this.

Stormfly stood up from her seat, prompting the other warriors in the room to converge on us. "Then get out of the way!" Stormfly barked, raising both of her fists.

"Camicazi's not an enemy!" I pleaded. Stormfly looked at me like I had gone insane, which unfortunately might not all be too far from the truth. "Have you gone mad?"

"She helped me escape and had-" I began, turning to the dark haired girl when I realized I didn't know her name.

"Heather," the dark haired girl said nonchalantly.

"Had Heather break you out! She might have had good reason to-" I know I probably sounded so hopeless and desperate that way I did, but I just really wanted to things to go back to normal, even with the fact that Camicazi's betrayal was still fresh in my mind.

"Let us rot in a cell," Stormfly grumbled. "It was her fault any of this happened! She's the one who started this whole 'heist' and then betrayed us to Alvin."

"And I'm not going to deny that," chirped Camicazi.

"Then why did you do that!? Why did you betray us!?" shouted Stormfly her voice filled to the brim with anger and a hint of something else. "I thought, I thought-" she trailed off, unable to bring those words out of her mouth.

While I knew Stormfly and I were the ones most upset at Camicazi for stabbing us in the back; it was then I realized, I never really understood just how much the betrayal might have scarred her. I wished I could have provided some morale support instead of just stand there like the idiot I truly was. It was going to be hard for her to just let go, way more than it would be for me and I still wasn't sure of whose side Camicazi was on other than her own.

Camicazi looked down at the floor, as if pensively trying to think of an answer to a very difficult question. "I don't have the right to call you my friend do I?"

Stormfly glared, as if already reserving judgement. "I don't know, do you?"

Camicazi drew something from her pockets, a white sheet of silk, stained with some dirt. Stormfly's eyes focused on it intently, probably because it belonged to her. "I don't know either," the Bog

Burglar answered.

Stormfly seemed to consider it for moment, before promptly taking the white silk and putting it around her neck. "Maybe, but you still owe me a few things, most importantly, a new outfit."

Camicazi gave a small smile in reply. "Well, looks like Toothless isn't the only other other person here to go mad now is he?"

Stormfly glowered, but it was considerably less threatening than anything else she did before. "Justâ€¦ don't make me regret it..."

"Of course not!" Camicazi chirped. Her guards retreated back in the corners of the room, realizing there was no danger. Still, they kept a close watch on the two girls. "Well, hopefully I don'tâ€¦"

Whatever went on between those two, it went over my head. I get the bandana belonged to Stormfly and all, but how was an accessory supposed to make up for the fact that she was imprisoned in the cold for about a week? Was this one of those girl things that us boys are not fit to know?

I shook my head. I guess with that crisis averted, we could focus on the more important things in life. "Soâ€¦ what now?"

The three girls all looked at me, as if wondering the same thing themselves.

"Well, I guess this heist wasn't a complete success," Camicazi muttered.

"I told you you have gone straight in and nabbed the spear while you could have!" Heather said.

"We could have done that, but then we wouldn't have learned where Alvin got it fromâ€¦" said Camicazi.

"Who cares about learning where Alvin got his spear?" Stormfly interjected. "I say we should just gutted Alvin right then and there!"

"I like her plan," Heather agreed. "Then we could have taken the spear and be right on our way!"

Camicazi shook her head. "Yes, but that doesn't solve a few other problems."

Heather just rolled her eyes. "Because the whole point of this was to cause even more problems, wasn't it?"

"Hey don't start with me! It won't end well for you!" said Camicazi with a threat.

Because the conversation was going faster than I could even understand, I turned back on my other friends, Fishlegs and Meatlug, who were having some time to themselves at the table.

"Soâ€¦ do you two know anything about what's going on?"

Fishlegs shook her head. "Not really," he said. "All we know is that Heather came by to break us out and lied to quite a lot of Outcasts to get us hereâ€¦ Course, Stormfly didn't really like listening to her, especially once she claimed she knew Camicazi."

"Well, they seem to be getting along fine now," I muttered, noting how the 'argument' right in front of me was turning out. I couldn't understand any of it, but I got the idea that it was half joking, half serious debate given the way several of the comments were turning out. Still, I am glad that Camicazi was able to arrange getting a such talented ally, whoever she was. Maybe once this was over maybe I could learn a little more about the one who broke Stormfly out for me.

Meatlug scooted closer to Fishlegs, apparently not feeling like she had enough of him, despite being trapped in a cell with the boy for a week. He didn't seem to mind her company. "All, I want to do is just go home, back to Berk..." she said aloud.

I was a little surprised she didn't say the King's Domain was her home, but then again, I didn't want to go back there much either; Berk was my home now. "I do, too," I said.

Fishlegs nodded. "Whatever this heist was all about, it was a mistake. We should never have become involved in it!"

"Well, at least we got to spend some time together," said Meatlug.

"Well, I guess that's trueâ€¦" admitted the blonde boy.

Thinking on it, I decided that maybe it was time to head back home. I mean, we've waste a week on this island for what purpose exactly? "Soâ€¦ how about we head back?" I suggested to the three girls.

They all blinked in unison, as if they idea.

"Well, we're still not done," said Heather. "We haven't gotten the spear yet."

"Or slain Alvin," said Stormfly, enough most of us in the room faced the draconic monstrosity that he was only survived because he cared about getting bartering tokens.

"Wellâ€¦ those things were secondary objectives," Camicazi muttered aloud. That caused all eyes on the room to turn to her, mostly out of disbelief.

"Um... what?" I voiced the question for everyone in the room. "Then, why are we here?" And more importantly, what was so important that it required a week for most of us to be imprisoned?

Camicazi turned to Heather, as if waiting for a prompt, but the dark haired girl shook her head. "Alright," the Bog Burglar started, "so, doesn't it bother you that at all Alvin just happened to show up right when we tried bag you, Toothless?"

I blinked as all eyes turned to me. It's been months since that day,

but I still remember the feelings and pictures of the last day I lived as a Night Fury. I could imagine the sudden loss of control I had when I was sent crashing to the ground, I can still taste the fear of death that Hiccup, then a mere stranger gave me in what I almost knew to be my final most, I could still the faint glow of unnatural fire that burned away the falsehood of a form that I had lived in my whole life, and most importantly of all, I still felt the pain very action that became my namesake. And none of it really stuck out to me as well, something that bothered me. "Uh, no"

"That Alvin came mere _minutes_ after you went down and ended up a naked boy on a pier?" Camicazi insisted. I probably should have been embarrassed by that, but the sheer gravity of the discussion quashed any humor that could be derived from it. "That he even knew where the Tribes would gather and then was near enough to go capture us?"

I blinked. Sure, I know the events seemed a little unlikely, but, I mean it still could have happened, right? Of course, the more she spoke, the more I wondered just how improbable it all really was.

Fishlegs, the only other person in the room who was there when this insanity started stepped forward and continued of the Bog Burglar's thought, "And then the fact Alvin shows up one day over a month later with a magic spear that can turn people into dragons..."

Camicazi burst into a big grin. "See, I knew you were smart!"

Fishlegs blushed as the whole room looked around him. Meatlug gave him an almost proud expression.

"So it's also not a coincidence Alvin wanted me to make something to protect his head?" I asked, feeling a little lost but that feeling was ebbing the more we all discussed.

Camicazi then gave me a grin that despite how cheery it looked sent a shiver down my spine, "But to protect his head from _what?" _

I frowned, suddenly realizing that there was something going on behind the scenes. I spent just over a week building helmets for Alvin, each one getting better, stronger than that last as I figured out better metalcrafting techniques and improvising new runes to make the magic stronger. At some point, I even managed to make a helmet that _broke _a warhammer trying to bash it! Yet no matter how much time I spent, no matter how strong the helmet was, Alvin threw it aside and told me to make a new one. Now I had to wonder, what if Alvin didn't want me to protect him from physical harm? "I don't know" I half-lied. I had an idea, but it was too early to tell whether or not it was actually what was going on.

Stormfly looked at me somewhat suspiciously. I think she and I were thinking the same thing, she said nothing to confirm it, "So, the whole reason you stabbed me in the back is to learn that Alvin wanted to have a helmet?"

Camicazi shook her head. "No," she said, almost glad she could say it. She took out something from one of her pockets and placed it on a table. I unfolded it, revealing a rather large map of what might have been the whole Barbaric Archipelago. Dozens of names were written all

over it, listing the names of Viking Tribes and islands. Among them, I could make out familiar names like like the Meatheads, Bog Burglars, and even the Hair Hooligans, my own Tribe, but most of them I was unfamiliar with such as the Shivering Shores or the Peacables. Oddly, several of the names are crossed out, underlined, or circled, their meaning completely lost on me.

Heather whistled, apparently understanding what that was. "Okay, that's definitely important..."

Camicazi gave her a big grin, as if she had just the most valuable thing that she could have taken from Alvin.

"Soâ€¦ you betrayed us so you could steal map?" Stormfly questioned.

"Not just any old map!" said Camicazi. "I'm going to be showing this at the next Thing once it happen."

"I fail how to see how it could influence politics," muttered Stormfly.

"It's worth it," insisted Camicazi. "This thing can destroy Alvinâ€¦" She folded the map up and put it back in her pocket.

"I'm with Stormfly on this," I admitted. "I fail to see how a sheet of paper can undo the Outcast Chief."

"Says the boy who can make things explosives by writing lettersâ€¦" muttered Camicazi almost wistfully. I guess with all the time I wasted trying to fruitlessly navigate the tunnels, Savage or one of the thugs by the door told the story of what happened. "With this, we can all go home now!"

Stormfly focused her attention at Camicazi, as if wondering if that sheet of paper was completely worth the suffering she went through. "Are you sure it will lead to Alvin's demise?" she questioned.

Camicazi nodded. "So long as I can bring this before the other Viking Cheifs, once everything thaws of course."

"So... why exactly did you need me and Fishlegs?" Meatlug asked.

Camicazi blushed. "Well, I didn't, I just wanted Hiccup to come along, but he kept refusing. So I thought to pressure him in, but-"

Stormfly glowered at the Bog Burglar and then turned to the two larger teenagers. "Alright, alright, I'm sorry for forcing you two to come along. I just thought Camicazi needed more people coming to start the whole trip."

"Oh," Meatlug said sheepishly.

"Not that you weren't bad company!" said Stormfly with a forced cheer. "Even if it meant less leg roomâ€¦"

"Soâ€¦ does this mean we can go home now?" I interrupted. I still

didn't understand what made the map so important, but if that's what we came here for, then fine, let's leave before things go worse.

Heather stepped forward, " Yeah, you did say back when this all started that we'd all leave once we we got what we came for. If that's what our prize was, then I think that should mean we return home in piece."

Camicazi shrugged. "That I did. Alright, a promise is a promise. We can leave, now."

At the sound of those words, a wave of sudden relief fell upon me. My friends were safe, we got something that might help us defeat Alvin. What more could I possibly want? We could go home and abandon this place while things were still good.

The door fell inwards and suddenly I realized that things were about to get a whole lot worse. I hefted my axe in a readied position, just in time to meet the red eyed glare of a creature that was both man and dragon. Alvin strode into the room, his gnarled spear in one hand and his small hatchet by his hip. Outside, I could see the unmoving forms of the two women who stood outside being dragged away by a small force of thugs. "Ol' Alvin thinks he'll send you home," he said mockingly. "'Cause I know they'll want to bery you!"

I immediately took a step back, very sure that if I were to try and face him that I'd be nothing but a bloody pulp.

"Well, looks like I get to fight you after all," Stormfly tried to step forward, very unafraid even though she was unarmed, but Camicazi's arm barred her way.

Alvin glared at Camicazi and though I was not the primary target, I could just _feel _ the absolute hatred he had for the girl. "So ya thought to betray a Trecherous did ya'?" snarled Alvin.

Camicazi, just as brave as Stormfly, burst into a laugh. "It's not betraying if I never planned to work with you in the first place!" snapped the Bog Burglar Heir. "You were just too much of an idiot to notice!"

Alvin raised his his clawed hands at the daring girl, declaring a threat with action alone. At that, several men stepped in behind their leader, wielding vicious weapons and vicious demeanors that almost counted as weapons themselves.

In response, Camicazi's bodyguards stepped in, their shields and arms becoming the only things that stood between my friends and an onslaught that would have just slaughtered us. "Alright, ladies, you know the drill!" said the Bog Burglar. Camicazi was no coward, but she backed away from the frontlines and to the back of the door. Then, she kicked open one of the walls and a small section of it collapsed immediatelyâ€| Okay, she definately had been planning this from the get go. The Bog Burglar took off in a sprint, using the improsived backdoor to leave.

Alvin snarled wordlessly. He almost charged after the girl, but one of the older women got in his way, bashing him aside to her shield. He slammed his own arm into the shield, causing to shatter and break

into pieces. That set off the rest of the Outcast and the Bog Burglars, sending them at each other.

Because most of us realized this was a battle we couldn't exactly win, we followed Camicazi's example and took the back exit out of the building. Fishlegs and Meatlug took off after her first followed by Heather, who pulled on the redhaired girl's arm to keep her moving forward. I threw off the heavy cloak I stole from Bellybasher to stop it from slowing me down, but kept the axe, just in case, making me exit after all of my friends. After me, several of the Bog Burglar warriors leapt out as well, slowing down the Outcasts that followed after us, yet both groups somehow managed to stay at least a stone's throw away from me. Thankfully, Camicazi's little ploy caught the Outcasts off guard enough that we only needed a rearguard instead ofâ€¦ well, a guard for everywhere else.

Camicazi then dashed off the harbor, leading me and my friends onto the frozen sea. Off in the distance, I could see Camicazi's still unnamed ship, no longer hiding behind the rocks for what was likely unnecessary camouflage when the Outcast thought she was their ally.

"Alright, now is my favorite part of the heist, the getaway chase!" she chirped, much to everyone's relative discomfort. "I love running away for my life!"

"It's don't!" yelled Fishlegs. He was just barely keeping up with the rest of the group, Meatlug just barely in front of him.

I don't know how long we've all been running, only that with each and every step we took, we were getting ever closer to our own rescue. Turning back at the Bog Burglars who guarded our rear, their numbers were getting thinner, down to maybe only half of where they had started. Several of the women had to abandon the rear to flee alongside my friends once it was clear they couldn't fight at their best. I didn't know how long they could resist, but hopefully they could last the rest of the way. We were so close, that I almost felt like I was about to make my escape.

The key word there was 'almost'. Just when it seemed like we were about to get away, things had to suddenly get worse, yet again. A blast of dragon's fire cut a burning line of fire between us and the ship, right at the last few yards from its hull. Several Bog Burglars onboard cried in outrage and began shooting their bows and crossbows at the dragons responsible for matter. Several dragons, maybe five or six darted over head and harassed the ship, while another two came after the us.

We all stood, our mouths agape. We were so close and now our means of escape was now being threatened!

A Nadder went after Fishlegs, causing the blond haired boy to stumble back land on his rear. Meatlug tugged at the hulking boy just in time to prevent a volley of spikes from piercing his sides. "Woah, thanks, Meatlug!" shouted the boy, quickly picking himself up off the ground.

Stormfly and Meatlug turned to each other. The redhaired girl removed my fur jacket as well as her bandana, tossing them aside before the two of them returned their amulets. It has been a while, since I saw

either of them in their natural forms and as a result, I actually almost forgot that well, Stormfly wasn'tâ€|well, human.

"Wait, they can do that?" shouted Heather, surprised as the two girls became dragons. Quite a lot of Camicazi crew...women also looked stunned; I guess it wasn't everyday this sort of thing happened, well, for anyone who wasn't me, at least.

"Yeah!" chirped Camicazi. "Isn't it amazing?"

"Then, why didn't they just fly away instead of run the whole distance!?" Heather exclaimed. "We could have saved so much time!"

Camicazi just shrugged. "Well, then it wouldn't have been as fun!"

Heather just sighed and took out a sword, facing the Outcasts. She didn't charge in, but I knew she was getting ready to defend herself if need be.

The wall of fire was still going strong and while we knew it would go out soon, I didn't think we would have that long to wait.

Meatlug spoke a few words to me and I relay them to others. "Alright, Meatlug says she's going to take us one at a time to the ship!" I shouted. Hopefully, that would give them some protection.

"Alright, Fishlegs and any wounded who can't fight any longer, get on board, now!" ordered the Bog Burglar Captain. "We'll buy some time for you!" Camicazi then charged in to assist the Bog Burglar warriors, bashing her enemies both verbally and physically. "I know sheep who are better fighters than you! And we toss ours over houses for fun!"

Meatlug accepted Camicazi's orders and allowed Fishlegs to get on her back. He was a liability out here, especially since he was unarmed and couldn't transform into a dragon. Then, a few others Bog Burglars, the women who had blood dripping down from their arms got aboard the dragon. She didn't have enough room for everything, but when she took off, she had taken probably the heaviest burden I had ever seen a dragon her size carry. Her wings taking her over the flame wall and slowly over to the ship. Thankfully, the dragons didn't attack her as she did so.

It was at this time, I noticed the problems the defensive line was facing. While the Outcasts had their own casualties to worry about and the Bog Burglars were able to match and block off the Outcast mob lead by Alvin so far, the key problem was the Bog Burglars did not have the advantage of reinforcements. Just behind the battle, I could see a line of Outcasts marching their way across the ice and I knew that once they got here, it wouldn't be an even fight any more. If only things were what they were like a few days ago and the ice was thin enough to shatter, then things would be different.

Alvin broke through the line, alone, his weapons, both natural and manufactured, hinted red. "Who faces me first!" he roared with challenge

"I will!" roared Stormfly. Even if no one could understand the words,

the meaning would still be easily understood. She fired a volley of venomous spines at the Outcasts, sending several of them reeling in either pain or fear.

Alvin though, simply stood there and took a took several wounds at his arms. He pulled each spine out, disdainfully casting them aside as if they were no more than mere pinpricks. "Nice trick ya' got there," Alvin taunted, stepping forward with every word. "But it's gonna take a whole lot more than _that _to beat ol' Alvin the Treacherous!"

Stormfly understandably stepped back a little, enough that she actually ended up right next to me.

Then, Alvin grinned maliciously. "Say now, can ya' even fly? Does tha' arm of yers still hurt? I gave it a good thrashing didn't I!?" Glancing at Stormfly, I knew Alvin wasn't bluffing. Stormfly hadn't taken to the skies where she would have an advantage and for good reason. Her right wing, which was her right arm in human form, was still very purple with bruising that previously been much fainter; I suppose it was easier to notice the injuries on a larger, yet more vulnerable wing. It was doubtful she could keep her arm steady or flap it under stress.

Stormfly stepped back even further and not wanting to face Alvin alone, I followed her lead. Both of us ended up standing beside Heather as a result. While the line of Outcasts and Bog Burglars was still holding and we outnumbered Alvin three-to-one, that didn't make me feel any better about facing Alvin.

"I'mâ€| not much of a fighter," admitted Heather, her weapon pointed at the large dragon-man-thing.

"I'm not much either," I said, hefting my axe awkwardly above my head. I knew I wasn't the best in a melee, but that was all I had with me.

Then, seeing as we weren't willing to face him, Alvin surged forward. It all happened so quickly, I was sent to the ice by nothing other than my own surprise. With my face turned up skyward, I saw the small battle the dragons had trying to burn the ship into nothing but blazing driftwood. The crew fought on, downing maybe one or two dragons with a lucky shot every few seconds. Meatlug still ferried the wounded back and forth over the wall of fire, but pretty soon that might not be necessary. Briefly I saw Fishlegs holdingâ€|. wait, is he using a treasure chest to whack a Gronckle? My eyes might be playing tricks on me, there was no way Fishlegs could ever do that.

I rolled off my back and pushed myself, just in time to see Stormfly charging at the beast, her jaws extended to take out a bite out of the opposing dragon and her arms flailing out of control. Alvin in turn just barely had enough time to get out of the way of the Nadder's attack, causing the Nadder to miss completely. He shoved Stormfly out of the way, hoping to knock the Nadder down, but she was too quick on her feet.

Alvin, infuriated threw his spear at the Nadder, apparently forgetting its magical properties in a fit of rage. Stormfly leapt over it, making the attack only accomplish burying a magical spear in

a foot of ice.

Then, Heather leapt in, almost as if she coordinated her attack with the Nadder. She lunged forward, her sword's tip extended and would have probably landed a blow if it wasn't for Alvin's split second parry with his left massive sword-like talons. Heather slashed with her sword, flailing it at Alvin in a wildly imprecise and very undisciplined manner. And Alvin kept parrying it again and again, so much so that I was sure the only reason he probably kept parrying was just to see the girl's desperate attempts to attack. "Why don't you let me hit you!?" Heather screamed.

Alvin looked bored and then suddenly sent the girl flying with a backhanded jab. "I had enough."

I went in the moment Heather went tumbling to the ice, finally managing to bring my composure together. I might have been the worst Viking on the whole island, but at this point, but I was just so desperate, I didn't know what else to do., not when we were all so close to making it out with our lives.

Alvin didn't even bother blocking my attack and instead delivered a blow to my jaw not unlike the one he gave me when we met. I reeled and found myself flat on my back, my weapon by my side. I coughed up some blood as I tried to breathe in and put air in my lungs. The only thing that could have made the whole thing more familiar would have been if any of my teeth fell out, yet again..

"Well lookie what we have here, a useless good for nothin' boy. Ol Stoick shoulda a named you 'treasonous filth'!" Alvin taunted as he loomed over me. "You're going to regret crossing me, _boy_." Alvin showed me his clawed hands, hint of malice in those inhumanly piercing red eyes of his. I knew what that threat was and at it terrified me.

"Toothless!" I heard Stormfly scream. She lunged at Alvin yet again, this time with her taloned legs extend. She slammed both of her huge taloned feet on the Outcast Chief, sending him back a step from the blow.. I was stunned for a moment, relieved to see her...but then that all turned turned into terror.

Alvin, with Stormfly's feet still him, quickly grabbed hold of them. With each foot in a meaty handy, each claw managing to digging in and tearing cuts, she threw the Nadder hard onto the ice. "Yer good for somethin' after! Ya' make it easier to kill yet so-called friends!" Alvin spat at my direction, as he slowly made his way to the downed Nadder.

I don't know what went through my heart when I saw her lying on the ground, the monster that was Alvin looming over her. I don't know what I felt. Was it anger, rage? Or was it fear, foreboding? I don't know what it was, but it helped me see a simple truth, something really should have seemed so obvious to me.

I quickly got up and ran towards the spear Alvin left behind. The misshapen thing had terrible balance and felt awkward to hold, but it might have been my only chance with Alvin distracted, probably thinking of ways to execute the downed Nadder. The axe was too heavy for me to use, but a spear, even one as malformed as this, was just a metal on a wooden shaft.

And, praying for the best outcome from whatever gods might have been watching, I sprinted forward threw the spear at Alvin. For a moment, I thought Alvin would have just side stepped out of the way, evaded the blow or blocked it like he would at any other attempt on his lifeâ€| but this time, he wasn't exactly paying attention. Even though the spear might have been a gnarled piece of wood with an equally twisted hunk of metal on top, it still managed to go where I wanted it to. I didn't miss my shots, not as a dragon, not as a scrawny boy; that was the truth. It struck into Alvin's back, causing him to scream in anguished frustration and pain. He tried desperately to reached over and remove the weapon.

And then, with his defenses still down in confusion and pain, I keep running forward. Not even stopped, I picked up my heavy axe by its grip and dragged its head on the ground it as quickly as I could toward the distracted Outcast Chief. For this, it didn't matter the axe had no height to use. ground, I wasn't aiming that high. With a very a lunge and the desire to inflict pay back for an old injury he gave my brother, I chopped at Alvin's ankle. I didn't sever the limb and the axe might have been caught in his foot, but it did what I wanted it to do. Alvin howled in even more pain, and lifting his foot in agony.

Stormfly, in a brief moment of clarity, quickly got up and tackled Alvin face first into the ice so hard, it actually dislodged the spear stuck in his back. With the axe I stolen still stuck in Alvin's ankle, I quickly picked up the spear and brandished it at the Outcast Chief.

"Ye'll regret that!" he yelled Alvin, forcing Stormfly off of him with push. He stood up and pulled out the axe in his foot, ready to face the two of us.

Stormfly and I gave each other glances of uncertainty. Looking at the Nadder, I could tell Stormfly was getting drained from all of the fighting and I felt even worse than she looked. I used up all of my strength in that attack Alvin was still not beaten; there was no way either us would come out alive if we kept at it. Maybe if I did the smart thing and hit his head, I could have finished him then and there, but no, I had to hit something nonthreatening.

Fortunately for us, it seemed like the fight wasn't going to last much longer no matter how it turned out. Cracks began form in the ice, frozen material finally giving way to all fighting and fire done upon it. The ice was starting to break into sheets, making this place no longer suitable for conflict. Things were going to end really fast.

"Alright ladies, let's go!" I heard Camicazi howd. She and whatever was left of her forces quickly made their way closer to the ship, very intent at beating the Outcasts aboard before the ice broke off into even more pieces. Heather quickly joined up with Camicazi group and before I knew it they were quickly making their way the side of the ship.

I turned to Stormfly and immediately decided to get aboard her; she didn't seem to mind in it in the least. Under any other circumstances, the whole thing might have made me die of embarrassment, but these were _not _normal circumstance. Stormfly was

injured and still wasn't well enough to fly, but her legs were still working well, even with the damage Alvin did to them.

Many of the Outcasts, instead of chasing after the retreating Bog Burglars tried to make their way back to the harbor before the cracks did. The few that were bold enough to chase after the Bog Burglars received the full attention of a Bog Burglar marksman. The dragons, too, broke off their attack, even though the fact they were in air made the ice breaking apart a non-factor for them.

There was only one Outcast who was truly undeterred and he was right after behind us.

Alvin leapt forward, matching Stormfly jump for jump as we leapt over the ice, getting ever close to our destination. He screamed, fully intent into making sure all that was left of us was a bloody mess.

Frightened, I pointed my spear at Alvin and thenâ€¦ tendrils of flame burst out from the spear, wrapping around Alvin as it blasted him away.

"You. Won't. Get. Away!" Alvin shouted at the top of his lungs, each word clear and concise. laying on his back as the world around him slowly broke to pieces. And then, no longer able to support his weight, he dropped into the icy water below.

And then it was over. I didn't know what I did, what command or spell I willed into being to make the spear work like that, but it just happened. I used the same spell Alvin used to destroy so many people's lives to save my ownâ€¦ I didn't know how I felt about that, especially since I didn't know how it was going to affect Alvin.

Stormfly made one final jump, landing on the boat. We both tumbled onto the deck in a heap. Opening my eyes, I found we were greeted by the remains of Camicazi's crew and my friends.

"Hey, you actually got the spear!" Camicazi chirped. She seemed more at ease now, once we were free from danger and she no longer needed to betray us.

"And beat up Alvin!" added Heather, eyeing the weapon in my hands.

Meatlug licked me on the face, a dragon's way of showing respect and admiration. "That's definitely something to compose a song over!"

Fishlegs gave me a sheepish smile. "Well, your Dad's going to want to hear about thisâ€¦"

I groaned, not really sure how to begin explaining this adventure.

But one thing I did do was take a look at Stormfly. "So, was it all worth it?" I asked her.

Her broke out into a smile, well, as best as she could have done as a Nadder. Even as a dragon, I couldn't stop looking at her grins. And

then to my surprise, she gave me a little lick on the cheek. "Well, we won," she said. "I think that has to count for something."

I was a little stunned at that action. I had Stormfly's respectâ€| Was I dreaming? It sure felt like I was dreamingâ€| Dreaming sounded so good. I moved over closer to the ship's mast. The sails might have been burned and ashen, but they were still functional.

"Toothless?" I saw Stormfly question me.

I leaned back, putting my back to the mast. "I think I am just going to take a nap..." I said wearily. With the rush of emotions and activity gone, I had just realized I did all of that running, all fighting without any furs or protection. Waves of cold and exhaustion washed over me.

To my further surprise and and weary confusion, Stormfly gave me another lick. She laid down beside, bringing her wing as a blanket over me, much like how Hiccup did for me every now and again. "Well, rest easy then, you've earned it."

I was too tired to think anymore about it and I slept.

* * *

><p>Well, that's a lot to take in.

**Now, we've got Heather of all people working with Camicazi, a map, and the various mysteries and questions I've set up. Maybe you can all guess what makes them all so significant. **

And Matt: the whole reason I had to dedicate the chapters to either Hiccup and Toothless entirely was to ensure the flow of the action came in properly without too many major cliff hangers and breaks. Dividing it like normal made the writing so much more difficult to pull off.

22. Chapter 22

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

So, on looking back at the last chapter, I never realized how many typos were left in the later part of it. Well, I suppose it was unavoidable, given the circumstances of how things happened during the editing cycle. I'll see about correcting them in the future.

This chapter is shorter than previous entries but comes in only two days from the last one. Enjoy and if you like it leave a comment.

* * *

><p>How am I going to explain all this to my Father? It's not like I could just go up to him and say, "Oh, Father, I have come to tell you I met Alvin again. He ended up letting me stay over at his place for a week and he let me have have this wicked spear!" Oh, I'm sure that would go over well for him; even if I left out the parts Camicazi

sort-of-betrayed me twice, only she didn't, and the whole business about me fighting for my life against an army of Outcastsâ€¦ Wouldn't he be thrilled to know what I did for a week!<p>

I shook my head groggily. No, I shouldn't be thinking about that; me and my friends were alive, that's what matters. Sure, my head might have developed a migraine the size of a walnut and my legs felt almost as bad as the time I nearly got crippled by a certain Whispering Death, but overall, it beat spending another day working for Alvin.

There had to have been worse things than facing Father, like confronting my Mother...or perhaps some worse, Camicazi's. "I told you never to trust those Hooligans, they'reâ€¦ _hooligans!" _shouted the very large woman to her daughter. From the ice, she might have been standing a few feet lower than anyone aboard the ship, but she still felt so imposing. "Honestly, what am I going to do with you? You know that Stoick that Vast's ne'er-do-wells..." She forgot dragons, but then again, neither Stormfly nor Meatlug were in dragon form right now.

Camicazi kept a straight face and said nothing as her mother went off to a long winded rant. She didn't let her Mom know about what our little escapade involved, other than Alvin held us for about a week. Which was just fine with the rest of us; we had enough misery just listening to Camicazi being on to receiving end of her mother's spiel. Letting her know about the whole 'working for Alvin except not' deal would probably set her off even more. Honestly, how does Camicazi even stand it? Losing a dozen warriors this, taking too long to return home that. My own Mother was far more reasonableâ€¦ that had to be a record or something.

Night had fallen since we left what Fishlegs had unofficially dubbed "New Outcast Island". Camicazi, mostly to make up for the fact that we were imprisoned for somewhere around a week, took us to her home island for a good night's rest. Which probably would have been easier to do if a certain Bog Burglar Chief wasn't upset at us.

"And don't you dare argue with me!" shouted Bertha even though her daughter kept silent. "Now, take your so-called guests and then-" She said some curses and...were those directions? How am I supposed to do whatever _that _is with trousers? Whatever she was talking about, it went completely over my head. "Now do it!" she barked and walked off, taking her entourage of warriors with her.

I turned to Camicazi and the rest of my friends did the same.

"That's the first time I've heard use an axe, a file, and finger nails in that manner," I commented.

"Should we be worried?" Fishlegs asked shyly.

Camicazi just shrugged. "She's letting us stay the night over! You'll be fine," she said as if it was a good thing; neither me nor my other friends looked sure of that.

Heather was the first to disembark, apparently believing in Camicazi at face value. "Well, it beats sleep aboard in this weather." My newest addition to my whole group of 'friends' jumped off the ship,

carrying nothing but a small pack. "There going to be a fire place?"

Camicazi grinned. "A nice warm hearth, I say! And if we don't have one, well, I can _get one!" _She jumped down the ship, bringing the remnants of her crewwomen with her. She turned back to the ship. "Hey, Fishlegs, Meatlug, mind watching the spoils?"

The two larger teenagers nodded. Fishlegs having apparently Meatlug jumped out of the ship first. Then, Fishlegs then handed her a large chest with a dent on one of its corners. The whole thing might have been a little too much space for keeping a hunk of metal and a document, but it was the only thing on board that could safely hold both items. Fishlegs then went off the deck. Then, with the large treasure chest in hand, two of them went off to Bog Burglar island proper, discussing how they were going to record the day's events.

Camicazi grinned, following the duo. "Well, don't get too carried away!" She then turned to her 'handmaidens', as if to let them know what she had to say applied to them as well. "Mum doesn't need to know about everything, right?"

A few nodded, though I couldn't tell what their expressions were.

Then, apparently content, Camicazi led her group forward to the pier. "You coming?" she asked the two who remained on board, me and a certain girl.

"In a minute!" I shouted before leaving myself. Then I turned to Stormfly, offering my hand to help her down. I thought it would have been right thing to do here, since she was injured and all.

The girl gave me a look of uncertainty, but she still accepted my hand with a sigh. And, with the most delicate motions I could manage, I her gently down on the frozen sea. "Look, don't get carried away," she said. "I mean, you did well today, but we're notâ€|"

I blinked. "We're notâ€| what?" I asked, confused.

Stormflyâ€| blushed. Why was she blushing? And what was she talking about? "It's nothing important," she said and then ran off.

Somehow, I didn't buy it for a second. While Stormfly wasn't always honest about everything she said, she wasn't all that good at lying. Sometimes it worked, butâ€| not this time. There was something eating at her, that much I almost knew, but I didn't know what. I mean, what was she talking about? Did I something I do offend her or something?

Mulling about those thoughts with no obvious answers, I trekked forward at a steady pace. The harbor to Bog Burglar island wasn't too far off, yet it somehow felt miles away. Maybe at the rate I was going, I could be there next week.

And I probably would have spent the whole Winter just walking to the island, if it weren't for something calling my attention. I heard a shrill whistling noise, someone calling my attention. "Overhere!" a voice in Norse called to me. Turning to one side, I saw where the

voice was coming from.

In the darkness, I saw a vaguely familiar looking man waving his arms at me to get my attention. The ship he stood on was dimly lit, but I could tell decorated various items. Not really having much else to do, I decided to meet him. Once I was close enough to touch the ship's hull, I suddenly recognized who was calling my attention. "Aren't youâ€| Trader Johann?" I questioned.

The merchant looked bemused. "Aye, that I am!" the man said with almost more enthusiasm than a certain girl I knew. "Fancy seeing you here, boy. Never would have guessed you'd be coming here! Why don't you step on in? If there's anything that interests you, I'm sure will find it here!"

I was about to check bag of coins by my waist, but then I realized Alvin's brutes took that. "I got no money!" I shouted

The man didn't seem phased or upset at that, which gave me a chill that had little to do with cold air. "Oh, I'm sure you don't need to worry about that. Come aboard and see if anything catches your eye!" I didn't know what he meant by any of that, since what he was telling me pretty much defied all I knew about how trades worked.

"Gee, stepping aboard a strange ship in the middle of the night, well, I've done worse thingsâ€|" I muttered. Trader Johann tossed down a rope and I climbed aboard.

"Now, if there's anything you want, just make sure you let me know about itâ€|" He said.

I did as Trader Johann instructed and took a quick look at the items aboard the vessel. Maybe it had to do with the poor lighting or maybe because I was distracted by some other matter, but I couldn't find anything that was really major. Sure, I ended up picking up a notebook and a few pens to give to Meatlug and Fishlegs, but my thoughts kept drifting back to Stormfly. Why did she run away? "Uhâ€|how much does this cost?" I asked the merchant.

"Oh, just go ahead and take it! Hardly anyone bothers buying those!" said Trader Johann, tossing me a wool satchel to carry the items in.

"Uhâ€| thanks," I said, taking the bag.

The merchant gave me a smile, but then it turned into a more neutral, unreadable expression. "Say, isn't there anything else you want?"

"Noâ€|" I said, but the man's eyes gave me that look that made me think about it. "I needâ€| advice."

"Hm, about what?" asked the man.

"A girlâ€|" I said.

"That girl who was running away from you?" Trader Johann said, bringing a spyglass from under his winter coat. So, he saw Stormfly leave me.

Feeling unwilling to lie when he would obviously see through it, I confirmed it with a nod. "I don't know, I'm justâ€¦ worried she might hate me or something."

"Hate you?" Trade Johann question, moving to the back of the ship.

"Hate me," I confirmed. "We've spent the whole week together, even slept side by side. And now she's... well, she's just run offâ€¦"

Trader Johann thought about the whole matter as if my explanation summed up my problem better than what I actually could. "Well, you could always try to woo her with an expensive gift; that usually works in my experience as a merchant. Rings, jewelry, that sort of thing."

"So, that'll help?" I said hopefully.

The merchant nodded. "And I know just what to get her!" The merchant dove into the clothign section of his inventory and gave it to me. "She wanted this, you know."

It was a simple purple dress. While it might have been made of wool or cotton, the way the fabric was put together was quite fine, a little more than the standard fare on Berk. Purple was also an exotic, unique color, something that stood out. Immediately, I knew Stormfly would love this, especially since she had little else to wear. Also immediately, I knew I couldn't afford it. I hesitantly put it gave it back. "It looks quite expensiveâ€¦"

Trader Johann apparently was stubborn about letting me walk away from his store empty handed. "Oh, I insist! Take it!"

Confused, I folded it up and put it in my new pack, careful not to accidentally smear the fine garment with my charcoal tipped pens. "Why are you doing this?" I questioned. I mean, not that I was complaining, but it's hard not to be a little suspicious of being given free items.

"Oh, let's just say my best customer paid ahead of time," said Trader Johann, a smile forming on his face. "He didn't know what to give you, so he figured to let you decide for yourself."

I blinked, suddenly realizing who my benefactor was. "Waitâ€¦ this is Hiccup's doing?" I mean, last I checked, neither of them wanted to do anything with the other. To think Hiccup forgave me enough to let me just acquire items from a store without much effort other than declaring I wanted something was hard to believe.

Trader Johann gave me a wink, but didn't confirm or deny verbally.

Also, on thinking on it, it seemed a little strange I'd be meeting Trader Johann immediately after coming from Alvin's place. I mean, that was a little too close to coincidence. "Say, how long have you been here?"

"Oh, not long, about a week, I'd wager..."

"A week?"

"Oh, yeah, near Bog Burglar lands, too." He winked again. And that was all I needed to know. Officially, I told my Dad I would be spending time in Bog Burglar lands forâ€¦ diplomatic purposes.

I nodded my head, understanding, "Well, thank you," I said before I climbed down the rope and went off the ship.

"No, no, thank you!" said Trader Johann.

I backed away from the ship, knowing I was not likely going to see it come morning. If I was right, Trader Johann deliberately followed Camicazi's ship here, but since he couldn't find us, since we wereâ€¦ preoccupied, he stayed close to a Tribe of kleptomaniacs for a week to wait for me to show upâ€¦ I really hope Hiccup didn't ask for him to do any of that. Well, at least since he didn't have to wait for me, he could finally go.

I trekked back to the docks, filled with a sort of renewed vigor. Maybe it had to do with the fact that I lived in a world my brother didn't hate my guts or maybe it had to do with Stormfly.

And speaking of Stormfly, I was about half of the way to the nearest pier before I ran into her. "What, were you doing on that ship?" she questioned. "I was waiting for you!"

"Oh, uh... shopping!" I said.

Stormfly's eyes narrowed and zeroed in my new satchel. "But you have no coinsâ€¦"

"You'd be surprised what you can get with no silver!" I said, honestly.

Stormfly didn't look convinced. Maybe she was still upset at meâ€¦ for whatever it is I did that made her so angry.

So, figuring I might as well try the merchant's advice, I pulled the purple frock out of my sack.

Stormfly's jaw dropped immediately. "Waitâ€¦ where did youâ€¦ how did you?"

"I didn't steal it if that's what you're wondering..." I said gloomily. I went over to give Stormfly the dress yet she backed away, despite the look in her eyes that made it clear she wanted it.

"I shouldn't, I meanâ€¦"

"I'm sorry," I said, not really sure of what else to say. That cause Stormfly to frown. Was I making things worse? "Look, I don't know what I've done wrong, but-"

"Toothless, it'sâ€¦ not you," she said, almost nervously. It didn't feel like a lie, so it must have been true.

I sighed. "I justâ€¦ don't want to lose a friend."

"Friend?" she gave me a thoughtful look.

"We've slept together," I said.

She nodded. For dragons, sleeping in close proximity to each other was a big deal, a matter of utmost trust. Close friends tended to do it often and it wasn't unheard of for a dozen dragons to all nap so close to each other. Then again, our situation was kind of forced since we were in such a small cage, but then why did she put her wing over me after that battle today? "Well, I guess we are friendsâ€¦" she admitted.

"So... you're fine with me?" I asked, hopeful for a positive response.

"You'reâ€¦ okay," said Stormfly. "Just... don't put that big grin on your face."

"Done!" I gave myself a hard slap, trying to rid that awkward, satisfied look that immediately sprung up when she said there were no problems between us.

Stormfly giggled a little. "Oh, Toothlessâ€¦" she shook her head.

Then after maybe the sixth slap, I gave her the dress in my hands. "Think of it as an early Snoggletog giftâ€¦ for the Winter."

"For the Winterâ€¦" she mused. She then gave me a small little smile. "Thank you, Toothless..." She then folded the dress and carried it off.

Satisfied, I followed her both went to the nearest pier.

To my surprise, it wasn't abandoned. Instead, I found two shapes.. "Oh, hey Camicazi! Hello Heather!" Stormfly called out to the two girls standing on top of!"

Heather stood behind Camicazi and gave Stormfly a big smile. "Hey Stormfly! Nice dress you have there!" she compliment.

I, in turn, gave a brief grin.

Camicazi's eyes looked on to it. Hm, maybe I should see if I could get one for her, too.

"So, what brings you out here?" Stormfly asked.

Heather began to say, "Oh, just here to see-"

But Camicazi interrupted her. "Nothing, nothing at all!" And then she took Heather and the two of them marched off.

I wonder what that was all about. I shrugged, it might have been nothing.

* * *

><p>How am I going to explain all this to my Dad? It's not like I could just go up to him and say, "Oh, Dad, I have come to tell you that met the dragons who kidnapped me again. I went to go learn

possibly dangerous magic and I ended up getting in a fight because of it. Also, I met Mom!" Oh, I'm sure that would go over well for him; even if I left out the parts that I was talking to what was practically some sort of dragon God and that Mom was living as a Night Fury all this time! Would'n't he be thrilled to know what I did for a week!<p>

I groggily shook my , I shouldn't be thinking about that; I was human again, that's what matters. Sure, I was cold enough that I was sure that my arms and legs were turning a shade lighter than they should and I might not have planned everything perfect, but overall, I can't say this was a failure. Now, I just hoped Dad wouldn't freak out that I was going to be gone a day, but then again, Mom was gone for the better part for fifteen years.

As the only human in my group, I was the only one who really needed the campfire. I knew I could use the spell the King taught me to easily put any of them, except maybe Hookfang, in human form, but each of them had their own reasons for not letting me turn them back just yet.

I sat beside Mom, her body coiling around me like I was still too young to leave her side. She had decided to enjoy a little more time as a dragon and maybe ready herself for tomorrow's encounter. I'm sure the two of my parents would have so many things to say to each other.

Astrid, still a Nadder, blasted the campfire with her Breath. She would have been my first choice, after Mom, to send back into human form, but she wanted to try being a Nadder for a fours before I suppressed the potion's effects. She was going to let me cancel it out in the morning, before we arrived back home.

"So! you're my aunt?" Snotlout asked the Night Fury beside me. Snotlout wasn't going to turn back to human form just yet, mostly because someone needed to remain a dragon to carry the others home. My cousin was simply the one who volunteered, probably because Astrid had a decent chance of being on hi, Hookfang might have been big, but I doubted he could carry four people that easily.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Mom's head bob up and down. "And you're the child of my brother-in-law," she said. "You do take quite a lot from him."

Snotlout paused and gave her an inquisitive look, as if unsure what to make of that. I wasn't sure either.

Man, it was so strange being the only person who wasn't a dragon on the whole island and it only got even weirder when more dragons showed up.

"No, just put everything on the pile there!" I heard Hookfang give someone a stern talking to.

"But we need to see our liege to present our offerings!" said another voice. I didn't need to turn around, I already knew who was there. Well, not exactly, but I knew.

"Yes, yes, but right now, is not a good time," Hookfang explained. "Especially since the Flight Commander-

Hookfang didn't need to explain more. I heard the dragon who spoke to Hookfang as well as few others that were with him leap forward several steps and hastily drop lots of wet and slimy things onto the ground.

Mom gave Hookfang a bemused smirk. The mere mention Mom, for reasons I don't really understand, still scared the dragons here. "How clever," she said.

"Yeahâ€¦" Hookfang said shyly and went back to looking at.

Snotlout went and turned his head to look at me. "That'sâ€¦ a lot of fish," he commented.

Without even turning my head to go see it, I already knew there was a large pile of sea food forming right behind my Mom's side. Every few minutes or so, some dragons would show up withâ€¦ offerings of fish and wild game. Most of it was going at me and Astrid and Snotlout might have received their own shares, but for simplicity's sake, we just piled everything together.

"It's more trouble than it's worth most of the time," replied Astrid sounding like she had experience. Which technically, she did. "No matter where I go, my Kin, the Herd, they always keep giving me things!"

Mom approvingly nodded her head and then rubbed her nose into my side, as if to let me know something important. I glowered, knowing the little undertone in her actions, and said, "Because you clearly know everything about meâ€¦"

"Well, I kind of do," Mom teased. I don't know if she was being honest or not, but it still felt like this weird mix of annoyance and uneasy embarrassment. I mean, how many people do I know have parents that practically went into their kid's heads and read from their innermost journals?

Then, almost to my relief, the conversation changed abruptly. I heard footsteps and then I saw Snotlout's eyes light up. "Uh...Hey there! Uhâ€¦" Snotlout stuttered.

For this, I did turn around. Hookfang's sister, alone, came hobbling her towards the little campfire by the frozen beach. Apparently, she was injured from the encounter, enough to limp just slightly. She gave Snotlout a look of amused satisfaction. "Well, hello there, _Snotlout_â€¦" she said in a clear tone.

Hookfang gave her sister a look, a look of annoyance dawning on his face. "Sister, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, nothing, just wanted to meet my adversaries again, assuming they are fine with itâ€¦" she gave Astrid and Snotlout a slight bow. Slight enough that I probably would have missed it.

"Of course you can!" shout Snotlout. He thumped his tail on the ground, inviting her over.

She didn't come and instead chose to stay by Astrid's side as far away from the other Nightmare. "Smart choice," Astrid

commented.

Hookfang's sister gave a little satisfied smirk. She then turned to Mom and inched herself slightly away from her, a little uneasy. "Say, you wouldn't happen to know where your son is?" she asked my more, but not without a little bit of hesitation. She looked at me hesitantly, but obviously not realizing the scrawny boy in front of her was once a powerful dragon. Honestly, I had a hard time thinking that's what happened

Mom coiled her tail around me even tighter, just to make sure I was securely in her grasp. She gave the dragon a little bemused expression. "Oh, you wouldn't believe me if I told you," she said teasingly.

My eyes rolled. "She is right," I said. "Sometimes, I don't believe it."

Hookfang's sister eyed me cautiously, still unsure what to make of the fact there was a human sitting beside a Flight Commander. "Uhâ€| your pet seems interesting," she commented.

I immediately slapped myself in the forehead. With all of the time I spent as a dragon, I just gotten so used to talking to scaly faces that I forgot that well, dragons didn't understand Norse. I probably made myself sound like a mouse or some sort of sheep in her eyes!

Mom look thoughtful for a moment, as if the choice of words amused her. "Well, I suppose that's one way to put itâ€|"

"You're not making this better!" I told her. Mom still just kept her contented grin up. Astrid and Snotlout too burst out laughing realizing how hilarious the situation was. Much to my horror.

"Well, he did used to follow me like a stray puppyâ€|" Astrid said offhantly.

"Not you, too," I said sighed. Yeah, it was definately a bad idea to turn myself human so immediately. I was the only boy in an island full of dragons for Thor's sake. "Justâ€| go tell her."

Mom nodded her head, but still suppressing her laughter.

Hookfang's sister gave us all a confused look, since she only heard half the conversation. "Waitâ€| were you just talking to that Herd youngling?"

I nodded my head, just letting her know I understood her as well. She blinked, a little surprised, but still held her cool. "Just for the record," I said, even though I knew she wouldn't understand without aid. "I don't like being called 'Herd youngling' or 'pet' for that matter." My friends and family gave me an amused looks.

"Doesâ€| this have to do with what our King said that even the Herd may be brought up, to be elevated above the mere beast they were?" the female Nightmare asked, an eye turning to Astrid. I don't know if she fully understood if I was the same Night Fury that she ended up fighting over some power.

"Sort ofâ€¦" Astrid admitted. "But it's not so clear cutâ€¦"

"Didâ€¦ he lose favor and wasâ€¦ reduced to a mere animal?"
Hookfang's sister asked, confused

Hookfang shook his head. "They aren'tâ€¦ animals," the Nightmare said, hesitantly. Then he added, more confidently. "Living among themâ€¦ isn't too much different from that of our Kin, maybe somewhere like how it works in the Enclaves."

His sister gave him an even more confused expression, still not following. "I mean, but they don't speak our tongue, that makes..."

"It doesn't," Mom said abruptly. "The Herd... don't always speak the same tongue, but that doesn't make them lesser than our Kinâ€¦ They may not be able to fly or use Breath, but they have their own powers, their own knowledge."

The female still looked confused. I didn't blame her, the explanation didn't make sense, especially not without seeing it. I didn't exactly know how to undo the binding spell so that I could assume a draconic shape and explain things more direction, but I thought there was another way to make it more clear. "Mom, maybe it's time," I suggested. "Maybe she should see itâ€¦" It was partly because she probably needed to know what was the power she fought over and partly because I wanted to finally know what Mom looked like under all of the scales. She's been gone for some long, the only memories I had of her were the fact she had this soothing voice.

The large Night Fury did a quick scan of the area and then turned back. "Alright, I suppose there aren't too many prying eyes."

Everyone, except the female Nightmare, nodded.

Snotlout, perhaps being generous or perhaps wanting to show the female something spectacular gave me the wrecked remains of my saddle. I rummage through one of the nearby pockets and pulled out a somewhat thing, some adult sized tunics and trousers, the kind most women on Berk wore.

"I don't think those would fit all that well." commented Mom, "Well, hopefully they areâ€¦"

I frowned, realizing that Mom probably had to have been one of the tallest, most muscled women on Berk. Great, I didn't even know how large or tall my own Mom was and instead just got what I thought was _normal_; some son I was.

After placing those clothes by the ground beside her, I went behind her, careful to avoid the fish. The spell I was going to weave involved placing the runes over the heartâ€¦ Now, for reasons I did not feel like explaining in public or even thinking about, but were plainly obvious, doing that to either Mom or Astrid might have been problematic. So, I was hoping doing things from the back would have worked as well.

I had all eyes on me. "Oh, and boys, don't look at thisâ€¦"

Snotlout glowered as Astrid gave her a grin. "You heard her!" she declared and Snotlout turned away.

Hookfang bowed and respectfully did the same.

Then, once that was taken care of, I placed my hand just beneath one of my Mom's wings.

For a moment, I thought the spell didn't work, that the gift the King gave me no longer functioned since I was now in human form or that maybe my seal also affected it. But then, I felt a sensation that could only be described as the coldness of Winter combined with the heat of an everburning blaze run through my arm.

Tiny, golden runes started being written on my Mom's flesh and her skin rapidly turned into lighter and lighter shades. Scales, though already fine, gradually softened and smoothened, becoming much more flexible human skin. Her extra appendages all disintegrated, seemingly disappearing entirely. Hair was rapidly growing on her head, a very familiar looking brown I only really found upon my own head. I closed my eyes, realizing she was rapidly descending into human form and thus, making me uneasy. I was way too old to see my Mom in that manner, sure it was okay as a dragon, but it wasn't in human form.

I kept thinking of the words, carefully constructing my spell even without seeing it all happen. All I needed to accomplish was to seal the magic that trapped her in human form, disable it.

And with my spell finished— Mom stepped away from me. "Now, keep them shut!" I heard a sharper, more shrill voice call out in Norse. I did so, still afraid of opening my eyes. "Now then, you can open them—"

I did so. And what I saw surprised me even more than I thought it did. I was expecting— someone larger, bigger. I mean, most women on Berk were as large and as muscled as the men and that seemed to be the trend for how most Viking villages I went to. Mom was— different. Yes, she was muscled, but she was also lean, very, very lean, enough so the outfit I gave her just looked comically out of place on her body. Suddenly, it didn't seem so strange Toothless and I were so impossibly skinny for Viking youths, not when we were compared to her. Her hair, unkempt and unattended to for over a decade, was very similar to mine, enough that I actually pulled out a hair to make a color comparison. Yes, they were the same. There were a lot of other visual, like how her green eyes looked or how structured her face appeared, but it was all too much to take in.

I was stunned just by how much I took after my own Mom, like to the point I was looking at a very distorted version of my own reflection.

Mom approached me and closed my jaw for me. "You know, your own father used to look at me like that—"

The act was enough to shake me from my trance. "Uh— well, I didn't take after him all that much, did I?"

Mom gave me a warm smile that just somehow made me melt from the inside out.

I turned to my friends, looking for maybe some sort of ground that I could stand upon.

No one, not even Astrid or Snotlout, looked to be in a position to aid me. "Wow," was all Snotlout could muster.

Perhaps the only person who looked even more surprised by this turn of events than I did was Hookfang's sister. "Flight Commander, Dead Wings?" she questioned, almost worriedly.

Mom turned and gave her a nod. "Well, at least, I can still understand youâ€¦" Hookfang's sister gave her a confused expression. "Now if only you could listen to me."

Hookfang's sister turned to Astrid and she gave the simplest break down of the little family oddity. I mean, really, there was little else that could be used to describe it. To which Hookfang's sister had this to say, "You mean to temmâ€¦ that all of the Night Furies that served the King are really-"

"Herd," Hookfang completed.

The female Nightmare looked confused, as if her entire world was changing right in front of her. "But, they're Herd nowâ€¦"

"Their bodies just change," added Astrid. "We lose so much becoming Kin, but our minds stay the same. Snotlout and I were also Herd."

"And being a Nightmare is great!" Snotlout declared.

To that, Hookfang's sister shyly backed away from the other dragon.

"Uh, Snotlout, you might want to back off I warned..." I warned, realizing the whole situation wasn't something she was ready to accept.

But Snotlout pressed further, ignoring me completely, getting near the other Nightmare. She didn't bother backing away this time and instead flew off.

"Hey, wait, where are you going!?" Snotlout shouted to the skies.

"She justâ€¦ needs time," Hookfang said.

Snotlout's expression became hard. "Maybeâ€¦ think we'll see her again?" he wondered outloud.

Now, I was really regretting my little demonstration. I didn't think Hookfang's sister wouldn't take the whole situation so poorly. I mean, she did deserve to know what the power the King offered was, right?

I shook my head, turning to Mom. Her expression was neutral, unsure what to think. "I am sure you'll find her sometime soon," she comforted her nephew.

It was much more than I could ever could. Great Hiccup, even when you succeed, you mess things up for someone else.

* * *

><p>Toothless because of his dragon upbringing obviously sees the world differently.

Also...Hiccup really can't catch a break, can he?

23. Chapter 23

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Alright, so I know quite a few of you were waiting for this chapter for a long time. You'll know what I mean once you see it.

Please enjoy and tell me what you think.

* * *

><p>Riding a dragon to Berk felt awkward. Maybe it had to do with the fact that I was riding Snotlout, giving me a little bit of sympathies for my own brother's protests. Maybe it had to do with the fact that up here, with only a tunic and some trousers, I could practically feel the Winter air biting me straight to the bone. Maybe I was just so unused toâ€| being myself that my own skin, my own pink, wimpy stick of a body, that I yearned for the strong, powerful Night Fury limbs I tossed aside.<p>

Or maybe it had to do with the fact that I was not the one doing flying. It felt so surreal, really; I ended up turning myself into a dragon long before getting the chance to actually _ride one_. Sure, once or twice, I know I've been carried places, but I've always been lifted with their sharp talons and near unconscious whenever that happened; I very seriously doubt I was 'riding' in those cases. Up til now, I've only really experienced flying as the one actually doing the act, the one who directed and controlled my own movements. The fact that I was in the air, at the mercy of someone else's whims and desire, in this case being, Snotlout of all people, just never crossed my mind as a possibility! Riding a dragon has got to be the weirdest thing I've done since I've stopped being one by a long shot and that's saying something about me.

Or maybe, it had to do with the fact that I was dreading what came ahead. In the next hour, I could either fix everythingâ€| or make anything worse. I felt Mom's hand on my shoulders, a delicate, dainty thing that seemed so out of place from a hardened warrior, yet there it was. "It'll be alright," I heard her voice say.

I turned my head back and saw Mom's deep eyes. I wish I could remember far back enough to actually compare the then to the now. "I'm justâ€| hoping Dad takes this well," I told her.

"Good news, Dad!" I heard Astrid shout from atop the nearby Hookfang. "I've figured out how to fix everything, so everyone can turn back into Vikings! Also, I found Mom! Yeah, he's really going to be upset when he sees you!" Earlier today, I restored her to human form and

dressed in one of the extra tunics I brought. I probably should be embarrassed since she was using some of my clothes, but I guess there wasn't enough room for embarrassment right now.

I frowned at Astrid. I know she meant well, but I still couldn't remove that gnawing feeling in the pit of my heart. It's just that after all the failures, all the disappointments I've had trying to eek out a little satisfaction, a little glory in my lifeâ€¦ I couldn't help but think that things would eventually go badly, even a little. Recalling Skullcrusher's words yesterday only made me feel like I'd know where it'd come from. What if he spoke the truth? What if the King really had ulterior motives for giving me the power I asked for? And that's not even counting the possibility Dad might not take meeting Mom keentoo well.

I felt my Mom's hand close slowly around mine, giving the very comforting feeling of her presenceâ€¦ I wish I had more of that growing up. "I'm probably going to have some explaining to do, but I wouldn't be too worried about your father."

It felt so easy trust thing her, believing every one of her words without wondering if there was a hint of doubt in them. Yet, I still couldn't banish the feeling that things could turn out badly, especially if Dad learned of where Mom had been. "Are have to tell him...everything?" I didn't know how else to put it. An entire life living amongstâ€¦ well, the Tribe's most hated enemies is not I

"At some point, I'm going to have to. He deserves at least that much," said Mom, her words sounding world weary.

"Even if it meansâ€¦" I didn't want to say it, or even think of it.

"A blood price," Mom stated flatly. "Weregild, man-price, restitution, take your pick. "

Astrid and I both blinked. My Mom justâ€¦ listed off whatever payments she owed to those she wronged as part of the dragons raids just as if she was writing something off her to-do list. "Uhâ€¦ Mom?" I questioned.

Mom gave a deep sigh. "I used to worry aboutâ€¦ coming home after the things I've did. I know that sooner or later, I'm going to have to pay the punishment for my crimes." There was an odd silence after my Mom finished her words. She was right after all, sooner or later, she would have to face judgement at the hands of the Tribeâ€¦ and I doubted that'd turn out nicely. Then, Mom flashed me a smile. "But that doesn't mean I'll tell him everything, just yet. I can delay for a while longer, I think."

I grinned at that. We didn't have to worry about something like that just yet, right? "Well, as long as it means you won't get put into a challenge to the death the moment we touch the ground..." I replied. Hopefully, longer meant sixty years from now.

"Uhâ€¦ speaking of that," Snotlout said sheepishly, his head turning back just enough to get a good look at me with one eye.

"Say...Hiccup, you're gonna change me back, too, right? I mean, you don't exactly need me to fly you guys anymore, so, will ya?" That question ended the previous conversation about blood debts, prices to

be paid, and judgements to be made, mostly to my relief. I didn't want to dwell on those things any longer. Yet, the inclusion of a single word added a whole new dimension of confusion, "..._Please_â€| "_

For something so simple, so seemingly innocuous, the question just left me stunned. Snotloutâ€| asked me for something, and not in his usual way. I don't think I ever heard Snotlout say 'please' to me about anything, _ever_.

Astrid, also took notice of that; She couldn't believe her ears either. "... Okay, who are you and what have you done to Snotlout?" she said.

The Nightmare gave Astrid and I a sheepish grin. Mom gave my cousin a small little grin of her own and then gently stroked the back of his wings. She didn't seem all too concerned or conflicted, probably because she never knew the boy-turned-Nightmare enough to know he was acting odd. "Oh, of course, Hiccup would change you back, right?"

"Right, uh, of course, I will," I said automatically, mostly because I didn't know what else to say. Snotlout asking me for something politely, threw me that much of guard. I justâ€| couldn't say 'no', especially when Mom was more or less speaking for me.

"Thanksâ€|" Snotlout said contentedly.

Hookfang, who had stayed silent up until now gave me an approving nod. Whether or not that had to do with a certain sister of his was not up for discussion, though I had to image there was more to it than simply that.

Astrid gave me a look, the same thoughts must have been running through her head. As far as either of us knew, Snotlout didn't much mind well, being a Nightmare. In Fact, he boasted about it more than one occasion. He certainly didn't seem to have any problems playing with Gustav the other day and he certainly felt like taking advantage of his massive gullet by eating all of our 'offerings' last night. And yet, now he was making extra sure that he was going to be returned to human form. The question on the tip of my lipsâ€| was why?

I shook my head. None of this was my business, it was all Snotlout's; I shouldn't intrude. Maybe I'll ask him later, I don't know. "Well, maybe after I reintroduce Mom and Dad," I told my cousin. I also didn't tell him, it was because I didn't have any clothes that fit him. Hopefully, he knew that already.

I saw Snotlotu nod his head. "So, the sooner we get back, the sooner you could change me backâ€|"

"Well, yes-" I immediately began to regret saying that. Snotlout took off, wings angling backward, going at twice, no, thrice, his previous speed. What had been a leisurely flight turned into a test to see how long I could hold tightly on a Nightmare's neck. Now, I wasn't too scared of flying on its own, I after all did some stunt flying to pass the time not too long ago. I probably would have taken this all with some enthusiasm. However, flying is much more frightening given the fact that well, this was Snotlout and I didn't exactly have any

of my safety gear with me. "Snotlout!" I barked in terror.

"Hey, you holding on tight?" Snotlout asked me, still barreling through the frigid clouds. Maybe for a moment, he was going to ease up or slow down; maybe enough so that I didn't fear looking down at the frozen sea below.

Before I could say 'no' or protest, to my horror, Mom answered for me. "Keep going!" she yelled. "We're fine!" Then, she held an arm against my waist, a gesture that probably would have been more comforting under other circumstances. Instead, it just made me uneasy. Mom was definately not a coward and that terrified me! About the only comfort I had was that I could see Berk's cliffs overhead.

"Alright!" declared the Nightmare. And still, Snotlout had a means to take that comfort away. With my Mom's command and renewed vigor, the Nightmare burst forward.

Before, I knew what was happening, we were over the frozen harbor. Mom chortled with bubbling laughter, clearly pleased and enjoying herself. "Come on, son, you should have fun!" she declared, once we were past the cliff's edge.

"I think I'm getting too old to ride slightly older relatives!" I shouted, the irony of my statement being something I intentionally invoked. Boy, Toothless was sure going to laugh when he heard this story.

I could see a dozens of Vikings turning their gaze skyward, looking at the scene equal parts awe and equal parts utter perplexity. I'll be honest, waking up to see an overexcited Nightmare, being ridden by someone who's been missing for over a decade and someone who should be much larger and covered in scales, might not exactly be the most normal thing to happen around Berk. And these days, it _really_ took something to make people start wondering what they've been drinking.

Thankfully, there wasn't much left to go. A few more seconds of screaming and begging to be on the ground, I finally got my wish when Snotlout landed right next in front of a set of large massive doors. Assuming if I knew my Dad's early morning schedule well, chances were, he'd be right inside, hosting breakfast while planning a meeting of some sort. Hopefully, the topic wasn't me.

Mom smiled as she got off first, not looking as exhausted or fatigued as I felt. "So, I see the Great Hall hasn't changed much. Still the same old doors since I was a wee little girl," she mused.

I got off just a second later, thanking that Odin, Thor, and even Loki that I made it back home in one piece. And to think, I could have avoided all of this, if I had done the smart thing and rode Hookfang but why oh, oh why, did I convince myself to let her have the actual dragon to herself? Snotlout gave me a contented little grin, looking almost like he was a dog wondering if he did a good job; it might have been the exhilarated panting and drooping tongue.

"Alright, I'll definitely turn you back as soon as I'm done here," I stated. The sooner Snotlout was not a dragon, the less likely I'd

have to do that Nightmare gave me a lick, to which I simply accepted. I mean, I have been waiting for my cousin to give me a little respect ever since the first time we entered Thawfest and it wasn't like I didn't give my own brother a few wet smacks to the check. Still, I did wipe my best to wipe the spittle off my face.

Turning my attention away from my family, I saw the assembled crowd of onlooking Vikings, all of them with looks of bewilderment stuck on their faces. It wasn't exactly hard to tell what two things caught their attention. Granted, usually, just walking by people didn't normally elicit this much of a response, but then again, this was the first time I shown my face in months. It actually feltâ€¦ amusing, comical to show up, now of all places, just as I really was. It felt good to not be the most dangerous dragon on the whole island!

Then, once the initial shock wore off, they all began talking amongst themselves. "Is that Hiccup?"

"No way, isn't he supposed to be, you know, covered in scales?"

"Maybe, but look at the lady standing right next to 'em!"

"Is that-"

While the Vikings had their time to look at me, I had a chance to look at them. Strangely enough, some of them were dressed in full combat gear, chainmail, guarded helmets; even the Vikings who were dragons had their own little get ups with war paint and modified iron helmets of varying shapes and sizes. One of Gronckles for instance had what looked like a bladed nose guard, almost like some sort of face mounted axe.

"Hiccup!" I heard coming from above. The crowd burst into even more frantic speculation when they received that confirmation.

"Astrid!" Snotlout and I shouted back, both excited to see her. Hookfang and Astrid arrived mere seconds later and landed right next to us.

The blonde haired girl then dropped off the dragon. "Okay, you're definitely going to have to fix Snotlout once this is over!" she declared.

The Nightmare gave her a grin and almost went to lick her, but a glare was all that was needed to kill that thought.

"Definitely," I confirmed absentmindedly, my gaze still observing the gossiping Vikings around us. Now that Astrid showed herself, they added her to the mix.

"Hey, isn't that the Hofferson girl supposed to haveâ€¦ like a tail now?"

"But she doesn't!"

Astrid squinted a glare at the Vikings who were discussing that topic, closing it prematurely.

Mom, apparently taking the gossip in stride, just stood in front of the door quietly, taking it all in.

"You know, I know we're Vikings, well, _you _guys are, and all, but do you really have to show to breakfast in full armor?" I told them, grabbing the attention of the crowd before it devolved even further into rampant speculations.

Several of them burst out into pained laughs. "That's definitely the Hiccup we know!" one said.

I cracked a smile at that. I don't know whether that was meant to be a compliment or an insult, or something else entirely, but it felt good to finally talk to ordinary people again. In fact, I was pretty sure it wasn't anything overly negative, given how many men were cheering my name. "Hiccup the Cursebreaker!" I heard several of them shout. The dragons beside them roared out the same thing, definitely looking forward for what I could do for them.

"You Dad's been looking for ya!" one of the other men shouted, a laugh erupting from his belly.

"Yeah, he's even called a meeting to come look for ya!" said another.

That definitely explained all of the equipment. Mom turned to look at me, a little puzzled. "I've been kidnapped twice already, Dad probably just wants to make sure I am safe," I shrugged.

"Isn't this a little much?" questioned Astrid.

"Maybe a little," I admitted. Mom and Astrid both squinted at me, so I changed my answer. "Okay, well, you can't say he's taking my safety lightlyâ€|" Maybe, I should be a little frightened my Dad would go that far to keep my safe. I mean, he pretty much formed an alliance and declared war on an entire Tribe just to keep my safe the first time.

"We'll have to clear this up with your Father," Mom stated, making her way to the door.

"Excuse me, Ma'am!" shouted one man loud enough to be heard from the crowd below. Mom stopped just as her hand was about to reach the wooden entryway. The anonymous man stepped forward. "Are youâ€| Valhallaraâ€| Er, Valka?" For someone who had few names as a dragon, Mom oddly enough had plenty of ways for people to address her as well.

Mom turned and gave the man a grin and nodded her head. That sent the crowd of Vikings to burst out into a roar of speculation and praise.

And then while, the crowd was still celebrating my return, Mom led Astrid and myself inside the Great Hall, leaving Snotlout and Hookfang amid the cheering crowd. I don't think Snotlout minded too much, since a few of the dragons there went up and began asking him all sorts of questions, mostly pertaining to the little quest I did. Hopefully, Snotlout would rather talk about something other than the fact I bargained with a mountain sized dragonâ€| then again, I

doubted people would believe it if he said anything about the King.

I'll admit, aside from knowing my Dad was mobilizing a fleet to search for me, everything was turning out pretty well. I mean, the people of Berk didn't seem all too displeased seeing me in human form. Several in fact, were giving me a new title, one that I was sure I could live up to. I left like there was little that could go wrong from here, which probably meant that things were about to get a whole lot worse, but that was just experience talking.

Once inside, there was nothing left of the maniacal, celebratory cheers outside; it was replaced by serious tone than what the hall usually held, but that probably had to do with the fact everyone was gathered to discuss an important matter. Still, that didn't stop the humans from eating out of their plates or the dragons from their feeding bowls.

As we approached, I could hear my Dad leading a discussion of some kind. "-don't care what objections you all have to finding my son! You're all going to find him if it's th-" He stopped mid sentence and looked at me with open eyes.

The whole room converged at me, giving me the same partly awed, partly dazed looks the people outside gave me not a few minutes earlier. "I'm right here," I said flatly.

Dad, and a whole bunch of other people who had a hard time believing it raked at their eyes, removing whatever weariness they had before. Gobber, my old mentor promptly dumped out the contents of his mug on the floor. A few more men, realizing it was me they were seeing immediately put away their weapons and apparently feeling rather silly about forming a search party for someone that was right in front of them. About the only two people in the room who weren't in shock or surprise from my sudden reappearance in human form were the old woman who had probably seen everything and the old man who sneered at my very existence.

"H-Hiccup?" Dad stammered, still stunned by a wave of disbelief. He stepped forward, pushing several other men out of his way; they too were too stunned to move.

"It's me, Dad," I confirmed, stepping forward but feeling un easy. I tried to smile, but I knew how awkward I must have looked, facing the crowd. Really, spending so much time unable to talk to most people didn't help my communication skills in the least.

My father, once up to me, put his hands over my shoulders and looked me straight in the eyes. Looking at his changed, more yellowish irises. I had the feeling he was just doing that to make sure he wasn't the one dreaming. "You'reâ€| smallerâ€|" my father said in an awkward tone.

I shrugged, feeling like I could maybe get a foothold on the conversation by responding in my usual way. "I dunno about that. I actually think I might have put on a little weight," I said, tugging a little at my green tunic. "I barely fit in this thing!"

Dad gave me a big grin. "Well, maybe you did grow an inch since the last time I seenâ€| youâ€|" And then, Dad just wrapped his arms around

me as hard as he could. I almost felt like I was suffocating, like I was being crushed under the very weight of his own affection. Yet, I didn't let go, I didn't resist. It's been...far too long since I've been in his arms.

I don't know how long it lasted, that big hug in front of the entirety of the Great Hall. I want to say it lasted for maybe a minute, but yet, I thought the word 'eternity' might have been more accurate. It only ended when I saw a big, meaty, hairy arm tap on my Dad's shoulders. "Er, Stoick..."

"Not now, Gobber, I'm in the middle of something." Dad brushed his friend's hand away.

"Uh, it's important," the blacksmith insisted.

"It's okay, Dad, you gotta see!" I added.

I pushed myself off my Dad so that Gobber could grab onto my Dad's head and direct him at what he needed to see. Then, I took a step back to see how everything would all play out.

Immediately, my father began brushing off whatever food and dirt stains that had accumulated on his tunic, furs, and armor. Boy, do I hope I don't look that embarrassed whenever I'm about to meet Astrid. "You do look like that," Astrid said, as if she was reading my very thoughts.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," I whispered, though I didn't exactly feel upset.

My father didn't make any sound as he approached, not even the sound of his normally noisy boots.

Mom gave my Dad an awkward smile as she approached him. "Now, Stoick, I know that you're mad me for not showing up for fourteen years, but-"

Dad never let her finish that sentence. If the hug I got from him was strong enough to make worry if my back was going to be sore. Then, I was sure the one Mom got probably would have broken every bone in my body, that was even if Toothless shared the brunt of it and even if we were dragons several times our Father's size. Mom, didn't seem to mind, didn't seem to care. All she did was hold her old husband in her embrace.

"It doesn't matterâ€¦" Dad said tenderly, "It really doesn't matterâ€¦ just, welcome home."

If there were any fears that this would turn badly, they were immediately dispelled. Mom was about open her to answer, but Dad never let her say a word.

Astrid gave me an 'I-told-you-so' look. "That definitely ended badly, did it?"

"Oh, I'm still very sure that this could all blow up in my face!" I said mostly jokingly. I glowered, oddly upset my worst fears didn't come through. Story of my life, I predict that things are turning good for me and life sends me running for cover to escape some sort

of fiery explosion; then when I think negatively, close to the best possible thing happens. Still, there was one more obstacle left to face, whenever he showed up again. I don't know how I am going to convince Toothless about this all.

There was a moment of silence through the normally busy sounding Great Hall as to two reunited lovers held their embrace.

Then they separated from each other for only a moment. Both of them turned their gazes and glowing smiles right at me. Before I knew it, I was right between them, lost in warm, familial affections. The crowd cheered, even Astrid gave her own applause. It was in there, right in the middle of everything, that I learned something else, something that probably every bit as unfamiliar, arcane, and almost as unthinkable as the knowledge and power I received from the King; I was not a failure. Not any more.

That was something I understood.

* * *

><p>Riding on Camicazi's ship made me uneasy, mostly because I had nothing left to do other than think about how I was going to talk to my Dad. Yes, I could lie to him again, tell him that I spent a pleasant week learning how to pickpocket or steal someone's pants without them knowing, but I think I have grown tired of all those falsehoods. Yet, there was just no way I could just simply tell Dad that I somehow managed to face Alvin and take his greatest weapon away from him without him at least thinking I went crazy in the process. Even more, I don't think he'd let me see Camicazi again, if he ever learned of what her actions wereâ€|<p>

Perhaps the only thing that bothered me even more than the thought of facing my Dad was what Stormfly was going to do now. Still dressed in the fine purple garments I gave her, the red haired girl stood at the other side of the ship, looking at the fog and ice crusted spires in the distance. Helheim's Gate and King's Domain was just barely visible, but that didn't matter when one could easily fly over there. If I recalled correctly, she only really promised to stay involved with Berk and us Vikings because it meant that she could take down Alvin, to salvage what was left of our fallen Flight's Honor. And now that we took from him his most powerful weapon, did she have a reason to stay with us any longer? Should I be worried aboutâ€| losing a friend like her? It was still a little strange to think we've come this far from our Squire days.

Breaking my attention from her, I turned my gaze at Fishlegs and Meatlug at the rear of the craft. There was little doubt in my mind that Meatlug would probably end up staying on Berk. Now, I don't really know the specifics, but she definitely had some sort of connection which made it very hard for her to leave. I wish it was so easy with Stormfly...

My thoughts ended abruptly when I found Camicazi stepping forward. Heather was with her yet again, leading the normally unshakable Bog Burglar Heiress to me. "Soâ€| Toothlessâ€|" she sounded so skittish, like she would just run in a heart beat. It was almost unthinkable to imagine this was the same hyperactive Camicazi I've known.

And I don't get why she was like that. All day today, from breakfast,

to noon, to afternoon, she hasn't said much to me directly. It was either addressing lots of people like when she gave the orders to the sails to be raised or talking to everyone else. Now that it was dusk, she decided to finally greet me. "Uh, hey Camicazi?" I said every bit as cautiously as she did, unsure for why I was kept in the dark all day.

Heather rolled her eyes at me and then get pushing the Bog Burglar forward. "Hey, watch it lady!" chirped the blonde girl, for a moment, regaining a hint of her usual self.

"You don't command me!" said Heather as she dragged the other girl to the side of the boat. "Now, just say what you came here for!"

I blinked, not really knowing what to make of it. "Uh, is there something wrong?"

Camicazi gave me a sheepish little grin. "Oh, not reallyâ€¦ just wanted to talk."

I nodded even though I had a hard time following what she meant by that. Maybe this all had to do with all of theâ€¦ things that happened yesterday? Did she still feel uneasy about her own betrayal? "Uh, what about?"

"Oh, just wondering if you'd still like it ifâ€¦" she began asking, yet hesitating a little. "...If I came over every now and again."

"Well, yeah, you can comeâ€¦" I said, thinking that maybe yesterday hit her harder than I thought. "We're still friends, right?" At least, I hoped we were. She was kind of the firstâ€¦ well, girl, that I actually really got to know.

"...friends," Camicazi studied the word. "...I guess, we are," she said.

Then, I added a stipulation, something I was going to try my best to uphold. "Just, please no more betraying, my head's still spinning from that trick you pulled on those goons!"

Camicazi flashed me one of her usual grins. Then, taking a bow, she left. Heather left too, but she gave me a squint as she did, as if trying to make sense of me, my actions.

I don't know why, but once they were going, something in that discussion made me doubt that it was _just _Camicazi's betrayal that was bothering her. I knew that something that happened yesterday was eating at girl, but I didn't know what. She was fine right up until we left Alvin's old island, though it's possible that the dangers around us made it easy to ignore something until much later. Maybe, I could ask her about it later.

We didn't take much longer till we arrived near the frozen harbor. The ice was thicker and covered more area than when I left home, but that wasn't a bad thing in our case. More ice, meant less chance for any us to fall under.

As the first to disembark, Fishlegs and Meatlug hauled both ends of the old dented chest, containing our 'souvenirs'. Camicazi had

insisted we'd take the spoils we got from Alvin, on the basis Berk was safer, but they weren't the only things that the Bog Burglar gave us. "Now, just remember to bring that during the next _Thing_. I don't want to end up having to steal it back, _again._" Apparently, she didn't trust her own people well enough to leave it safe with her.

Fishlegs nodded, making sure his big meaty hand held onto the his grip as tight as it could. "Again?" he questioned.

Meatlug simply mimicked his actions. "Don't ask, _please_â€|" she answered for the blonde girl. Fishlegs didn't and the two of them walked to shore.

Stormfly jumped out of the boat next, flashing me a smile on the way down.

Then, I jumped out and afterwards, Camicazi ordered the ship to begin preparing to leave.

"You'reâ€| not staying?" Stormfly and I both asked at the same time.

The Bog Burglar frowned. "I'm afraid not," she said. "But hey, I'll be sure to visit!"

Heather, too, waved a few good byes. "Don't worry, I'll make sure she does!"

And then the ship full of women, young and old left the ice sheet and sailed off into the night, our only source of comfort a was a small oil lamp in my hands.

It wasn't long after that that my friends and I arrived at the harbor. The hour was late and no one really bothered to greet us, which I think we were fine with; we all just wanted to go home.

Fishlegs and Meatlug were the first to separate from the group, heading their own route home the moment we climbed to the top of the ramps in the harbor. "We'll see you in the morning!" shouted Fishlegs, hefting the chest on one shoulder.

"Hopefully, you like singing!" declared Meatlug.

Then, the two trotted off over some other dirt path, disappearing in the darkness.

That left me and Stormfly to trek the rest of the way alone on the empty streets. "So, youâ€| going to stay?" I asked her. I didn't know when else would be the right time and it wasn't like there was anything any else that we could be doing right now.

"Maybe," she said, as if she was puzzling out the the question herself.

"Iâ€| mean, you did only promise to stay untillâ€|" I said. For a moment, I hesitated reminding her, since it meant that she would probably decide on leaving if she wasn't thinking about it before. "Until you restored the Flight's Honor," I completed.

"Well, Alvin's still alive," she pointed out. "Humiliated, but aliveâ€|"

I blinked. I mean, did she justâ€| argue for a reason to stay? "So, you're staying? On Berk?" I asked, anxiously.

Stormfly flashed me a grin. "Maybe a little longer," she said. Then, just as I was about to make a right turn, she made a left, separating off from me. Her home was that way, after all. "But first, I think I'd have to check in with my Host if she'd be accepting it."

I returned a grin of my own. Well, at least, I could still keep a friend like her for a little bit longer.

When I finally arrived at my house, I had filled my head up with some of the ideas of how I wanted to spend my time with my brother tomorrow. There wasn't much else I could do other than think to myself, so I figured, what were the best things I could do to make it up to Hiccup for Since he was willing and able enough to forgive me, I figured, I might as well be willing to do the same, especially since my little escapade turned out so dangerous.

First, I was very certain he wouldn't say no to some early morning flying. Sure, I know he'd mostly be doing all the work and letting me reap a little bit of the rewards, but hey, it was something the two of us loved doing together.

Second, we could probably do something in the workshop. Hiccup had these plans to make an improved saddle and flight suit a few weeks ago, but that never really took off since I didn't have much interest in it and Hiccup didn't have hands. I think my brother would like it if we started the work on that.

Thirdly, Iâ€| didn't have a third, but I was sure I could think of one tomorrow. I guess I could just ask him, it wasn't like we couldn't understand each other right?

I stepped right in front of the door and gave it a hard knock. It was late at night and the outside was cold enough for snow to drip overhead, so I figured there were only two places my brother or Dad could be at this hour. Besides, the dim light pouring from inside, made me think it was likely someone was home.

For that gamble, I was rewarded by the twisting of the door knob and the sight ofâ€| a woman I didn't recognize. The brown haired woman greeted me with a warm smile and let me inside, despite the fact I didn't know who she was. She looked so familiar, yet I wasn't sure of how. Did Iâ€| go to the wrong house or something. "Come in, Toothless, we've been waiting for you," she said with much delight.

I didn't object, mostly because the cold shiver moving up and down my spine was all the argument I could have ever needed. I didn't even stop to ask the woman her name, but well, I'm not really surprised about complete strangers knowing mine. Son of the Chief, right?

I found Dad sitting his usual place by a table, munching through a large chunk of mutton and drinking mead from a mug bigger than my own head. When he noticed me approach, he turned and gave me an a big

smile that couldn't fix on his mouth. "Welcome home, son!" he greeted me with delight. "You've come just in time to celebrate!"

I blinked. I wasn't aware there was anything important going on. I mean, Snoggletog was still weeks away, wasn't it?

As I drew closer to my father, I suddenly found myself drawn to a figure that sat close to the fireplace. He was a boy a little taller than me, with brown hair and a light green tunic. Strangely, I knew I seen him from somewhere before, yet, I couldn't figure out where. At least, not until he turned around and said, "Hey, bud!"

"H-Hiccup?" I said, the moment my head suddenly realized where I seen him before. This was my brother, as he truly was.

The boy gave me a knowing grin. "Yup, that's what you call the runt of the litterâ€¦| though, come to thinking of it, maybe you should have been named that!" he said jokingly. But I didn't dwell on the comment for too long. My head suddenly felt like it was hit by that Thor guy's hammer, yet again. I just only stared at my brother. It's been months since my brother had that face of his and I only got to see it after it had been slightly not a Night Fury, he was just a boy nowâ€¦| the same as me.

"How'd- where'd-" My mind raced trying to figure out how this was all possible. We've been struggling for weeks to undo it and now, Hiccup was able to achieve a breakthrough without me.

Hiccup obviously knew what was going on my head, because he was able to answer my question without me even asking it. "It was a gift from someone," he said in a hushed tone, just low enough I doubted Dad would hear it.

And that was all I needed to know that the King had gotten himself involved. Somehow, I don't know how, but that great big, all powerful dragon was able to craft some sort of power to let my brother assume human form once more. And that meant Hiccup went did.

I turned back to my Father, the strange woman hovering just right over him. there suddenly started seeming a little familiar, her features very remimicent of Hiccup's. She knelt down and- I turned away before seeing, feeling uneasy at the sight of her.

"Toothless?" I heard my brother call out to me. Suddenly, I remembered the reason why my brother ended up fighting and it was right there.

"Youâ€¦| did itâ€¦|" I said, a little uneasy. Any moment now, I was wondering if she would come over and scold me for getting involved in some dangerous stunt that nearly cost me my life or maybe call out my cowardice for running away from an enemy.

Hiccup nodded. "She's our mom," he said simply, a warm grin creeping over his face. I didn't know he could view her in such a positive light.

"Well, I know that, but..." I admitted, a little frightened about what the penalty for denying that would have been. "I'm justâ€¦|"

"Scared?" said a voice so tender that I couldn't grasp how it could have once been so vindictive, cruel. I turned my head to one side and found Mother, a dragon-in-human guise standing right beside me.

"Mother, I-" I said, hastily backed away. I didn't want to face her, not here, not now. But she didn't give me the chance to escape. Before I knew what was happening, I suddenly swept off my feet and was set gently down the warm fire.

Mother leaned closer to me, her face soft and inviting, nothing at all like the stern visage I was used to seeing when she was a dragon. "I know I haven't been the best parent, but I'm—" Mother struggled to say. The words didn't come natural to her, eventually she managed to find them, "I'm sorry for the things I put you through," she said in a more level tone. "I'm sorry for never letting you have any playmates when growing up, I'm sorry for the times I sent you to bed without supper to toughen you up. But most of all, I am sorry for being a bad Mother—" In a long list of things I felt were very unlikely to happen, hearing Mother say those words had to be near the top ten.

I just stared at the strange woman, wondering how it was even possible to think that she was the same person that I had once known. She just seemed too nice, like I was talking to someone completely different. "Mother—" I said, testing to see her response. So far, she only nodded. With that in mind, I asked her a question. As I did, I don't know why, but my eyes couldn't see so clearly anymore. "Why did you do them?"

"I made some bad choices," she said in a calm, somber tone. "I just wanted you to be strong in a cruel, unfair world—"

I pointed at my weak, stick like body. "Then you must think I'm a failure. I'm not strong at all."

She shook her head. "You're not a failure, son," she insisted. "I love you too much to think of you like that..." There was something coming from her eyes, but surely it couldn't have been tears, right? Mother never cried, not even a little.

I looked away. For most of my life, I've waited for her to say something like that, some confirmation or positive acknowledgement that was I there. Now, I felt terrified perhaps even more so when it was just simple berating.

And then, I smelled something that caught my attention. Mother brought in a small cooking pot and set it over the burning fire. "Wait— what are you doing?" I questioned of her.

"Oh, nothing much, cooking a little something. Can you guess what it is?" she replied.

"Food?" I said absent mindedly.

Mother nodded and then smiled at me. I still couldn't get over how strange it felt knowing that under a different face, I hardly saw her smile at all.

Hiccup, finally decided to speak again. "Well, it's obviously food,

otherwise it wouldn't be 'cooking', now won't it?"

I glowered at my older brother. "Hiccup!"

Mother then added in, her gaze settling over the fire. "But what is it?"

I sniffed at the air. My senses weren't as good as any old dragon's but even with my human level perceptions, I could still get a few things out from the air. "It smells saltyâ€¦ is it some sort of fish?"

Mother shook her head, in a somewhat infuriatingly teasing manner. "No, not at allâ€¦"

And then it suddenly struck me, once I knew there could have been only one answer left. "Oysters, you're cooking oysters?" I said.

Mom burst out into a big grin, one that I could practically bath in its warmth. "Correct! It's your favorite of course!" she declared. "All for you!"

I don't know what went into me, but I returned the gesture with grin of my own. It felt so so strange hearing her praise me, congratulate me over such a simple, childish matter. Yet, I felt like it was the most important thing I could have achieved in my life up to this point, like I had finally solved the mystery of why I was even here of why I was even bothered with. What made this all even more bizarre was that this conversation really felt so familiar.

Hiccup went between both of us, interrupting the moment and then bringing me back to reality. "So, what do you think?" he asked me, sound a little hesitant.

To which I answered, "I don't know what to to think." I said, turning the sheepishly hopeful face of my Mother. Everything about her was so different, now, I couldn't really decide if she was the same person after all. But then again, maybe this was just another betrayal just waiting to happen. Maybe if I let guard down after I ingested her offerings, she-

"Now Toothless," she said, her calm, clear words breaking me from my own thoughts before they even began. "I know that appealing to your stomach might not make up for everything, but it's all I can do for you tonight. If you really want me to, I'llâ€¦ do my best to make things up to you. I just want your forgiveness..."

I focused on the cooking pot, the smell of cooking oysters wafting up my nose. I remember the last time, Mother and I had them, back before everything starting going down hill. Here it was, maybe the one chance I had to finallyâ€¦ fix everything, offered to me in a cast iron pot. Sure, we weren't Night Furies anymore, but were we ever? I made my decision. "Alright, Mom," I said, dropping the formality entirely.

She approached me and wrapped me around in her embrace, holding on to me tightly. "I love you, sweetie," she said, calling me something she hasn't in many years.

I hugged her back. It's been far too long since I felt her loving

touch, I had almost forgotten what it was like entirely.

I felt Hiccup join in, not a moment too soon. "It's okay bud, we're all here now!" my brother declared.

Dad who had been silently watching the three of us converse put his massive hands around the rest of us. "I don't know everything that's been said, but I do know this, I'm glad to be surrounded by the ones I love, my family."

I nodded my head as hard as I could even as much I was buried in everyone's arms. I looked in my Mom's eyes and saw her smile. It felt so much like meeting someone I used to know for the first time in a long time.

It was good to know my Mom loved me.

* * *

><p>I don't think this chapter needs much explanation for what goes on here. The family's all back together for the first time in years and all is well in the world.

Obviously, these are some big changes, but there's also more subtle things I've touched upon, that maybe you'll notice.

24. Chapter 24

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

This chapter took a little longer than expected, but I did manage to finish it on the usual time. Hope you enjoy.

* * *

><p>As my eyes fluttered open, I found myself looking into a woman's very familiar face. Startled to have such an unusual wake up call, I jolted with a sudden surge of panic, wanting to escape and evade my new guess. Unfortunately for me, the only way that I had available to me was a hard wooden floor. I landed on my back, wrapped up in a messy cocoon of woolen bedsheets, on the opposite side of the bed from her. I groaned just as I realized how stupid it must have all looked.<p>

The woman gave a short chuckle, her laughter like a tiny bell; somehow that just made it simultaneously endearing and annoying. "Oh, Toothless," she called to me. "You shouldn't do that to yourself, hurting yourself accidentally doesn't make you any tougher."

I sat up on my rear and raised my head just over my bed's wooden frame, allowing me to see the woman's face. "Momâ€¦" I groaned, embarrassed.

"Oh, don't give me that look!" said the woman in a stern, commanding tone, "I'm not letting you sleep in!" For a moment, I was about to expect her to pull a claw swipe or a bite to test my awareness. It didn't happen, but that didn't stop my nerves to quickly build up. And then, she offered me her hand.

"Uh, right," I said, mostly because I didn't know what to say. I accepted my Mom's help, thinking that too might have been another test, but that didn't happen.

She smiled, once I was upright. "Good." Mom patted me on the shoulders. "Now, Toothless just fix your bed and then hurry over to breakfast. You have a busy day ahead of you, if you recall."

I didn't, but I still nodded anyways; maybe I'd remember or have a reminder once my head was no longer swimming in late night thoughts and early morning questions.

Mom gave me a contented smile, a feat that should have required moving mountains yet it didn't. And then she went on her way, leaving me to my own devices. Admittedly, I still had a hard time believing the conversation actually happened.

Last night wasâ€¦ unbelievable, so much so that I woke up thinking it was a wishful dream, something spun off by whatever childish desires I had. I forgave my Mom forâ€¦ not exactly giving me the best childhood and in return, well, it was like that never happened. It was like I never spent sleepless nights dreaming up ways to appease her inscrutable demands, like I never spent my lonesome moments wondering if I was loved. It was like any ill will and resentment I had toward her just seemingly evaporated. It was like how things were when I was very young, back before things became difficult between the two of us. In fact, it was very like the whole thing turned out to be a nightmare the two of us were just beginning to wake up from.

With just enough attention on the task set before me, I hastily folded my bedsheets and placed them on my bed. It didn't take too long and I soon found myself heading towards the kitchen. The rest of my senses were finally starting to wake up by the time I went over, enough that I could smell the scent of fresh oatmeal.

From in the kitchen, I could see Mom and Dad standing close by to each other, exchanging polite gossip and holding hands, though, Dad had a mug of what was likely mead in his free hand.

"Well, look who finally decided to wake up!" shouted my father as soon as I got close enough. "Morning, son! What took you so long?" he bellowed.

"Well, considering how much he ate, I'm surprised he hasn't gone into hibernation," teased my Mother, something I never thought she was ever capable of before. It's definitely one of the oddest things I've gone through today, but I think I liked Mom more like this. It was far better toâ€¦ just be mother and son than whatever we were before.

So, then I laughed and raised my hand up in greeting. "Hey, Dad. Hi, Mom." I called out to them.

Mom gave me another one of those smiles she seemed to have an endless supply of, likely making up for lost time.

"What, no morning for me?" teased Hiccup from behind father. Leaning just enough to see him through my parents, I saw he was pouring out

four bowls of our piping hot breakfast.

"Alright, hello to you, too, bud," I called out. "But only because you so desperate."

'Hey!'"

Mom and I both shared a laugh.

Dad and Hiccup then carried over our bowls of porridge over to the eating table and everyone gathered around the square table. Mom and Hiccup sat to my left and right respectively while Dad sat across from me. It was strange to think that for a very long time, such family gatherings were impossible. Now though, I think everyone who sat there all silently agreed to spend as many breakfasts and dinners as we could together. And with contented smiles, everyone took their spoons and dug in.

Dad and I were the fastest, but the messiest; each of our spoons were filled to still hot, overflowing globs of oatmeal. We didn't care about the heat, even if it singed out tongues; though I was perfectly sure that any hotter and each grain would have been on fire. Mom and Hiccup were conversely slow, yet neat; each bite savored and taking as long as possible. In fact, I was perfectly sure that everything, from the way they lifted their spoons to the way they so much as chewed and swallowed consisted of the exact same motions. Really, it's wonder how I ended up with Dad's eating habits, while Hiccup ended up with Mom's...

"So you boys have a big day today," Dad said in between gulps.

"I know I have to meet up with Snotlout first," I replied. Back after dinner last night, we spent the very last minutes of the night talking about activities to do today, just so we could clear as much time as we could to spend the rest of the day with each other with as few interruptions as possible.

Hiccup nodded. I still didn't recall the exact specifics, but I think Hiccup asked me to check on Snotlout for him. Why him specifically, I didn't know, but that's what he wanted me to do. "Just remember, he's family, too, and I want you to go check on him before heading off to the forge."

I nodded. "And then you've got to break all of the curses on every dragon, er Viking Viking-Dragon."

Hiccup nodded in return. "Somebody's got to do it, unfortunately it has to be me."

"Aye, but it's like a gift from the gods!" shout my father. He was the only one who did, but no one really denied him. The King was the closest thing we all knew to a god. In fact, I was pretty sure he counted.

"Anyways, Hiccup, Fishlegs will want to see you." I said, taking another flaming spoonful.

Hiccup nodded again. He knew what about Alvin's spear, since that was what the whole point of our leaving was to begin with. Since we returned, we obviously succeeded. "Well, I haven't seen the big guy

much in a while, so I'll visit him for a little before I see the Gothi."

"Hm, and then we could spend an hour or two fly-"

"Er, no can do, bud," Hiccup apologized. "We can spend time at Gobber's forge, but we can't go flying."

"Wait, why not?" I frowned. After all of the times he's tried to get me to flying with him, the first time I actually want to go, he denies me.

"Well, it's not like I can justâ€¦ turn myself back into a dragon," admitted Hiccup. "I mean, I don't think it's a simple matter of just...poof! I want to be a dragon again!"

I glowered, but accepted the reason. Whenever we tried mixing magic of different kinds together, the results tended to be unpredictable and not all that fun. Arrows that cancel out some forms of magic could be potentially lethal in the right circumstances, as I learned the hard way. Sure, maybe we could end the effect that keeps Hiccup in human form, or we could cause him to blow up. "And I was just getting used to the early morning flight routine."

"Same here, but, same here," Hiccup sighed.

Mom and Dad both ended up cracking up laughing. "You spent all that time trying to not be a dragon and now you want to go back! Make up your mind boy!" shouted Dad.

"Hey, it's not that easy!" countered Hiccup.

The rest of our meal was full of talk. The whole family took turns teasing each other for even the slightest of wrong doings and all of it was in good fun. Dad brought up several of Hiccup's most well known blunders, like the time he set Gobber's fake limbs on fire. Hiccup, in turn, brought up some really embarrassing moments involving Dad's attempts to oneup the other Chiefs in various contests; I couldn't stop laughing hearing how both he and Bertha ended up placing dead last in a swimming race due to a trick involving blubber. I once even made a joke about how Mom pushed me off a cliff and not once did anyone stop to consider the whole thing as nothing but an idle boast. Mom ended up laughing the most out of everyone, her voice almost like ringing bells all throughout.

Before we all knew what had happened, the short meal time together ended and everyone was on their way. As much as I wanted to just stay there and enjoy being around my family, a family that I never got to enjoy when I was young, I did have to get going eventually. Hiccup and I were the first to leave the house, our parents staying behind to clean up before heading out themselves.

We stepped out of the door and made our way on the frost covered streets of Berk proper. We both had our own places to get going to, yet there was plenty of distance to go before we hit either Fishlegs's or Snotlout's houses; that was more than enough time to have a little bit time to chat.

Turning to me, Hiccup pursed his lips and gave me a knowing smile. "So how'd it go?"

I sighed. I knew I was going to have to explain a little bit of the heist eventually, especially since Hiccup's detour end up looking so successful. "Oh, Camicazi just had us spend a week longer than we should have," I said. At this hour and weather, there were few people out and about, but I didn't want to chance it that someone might end up telling father something he really shouldn't hear it. "Fishlegs has our souvenirs," I added on top of that.

Hiccup stopped walking and blinked. "Iâ€| wasn't talking about that," he said.

I, too, stopped. "Ohâ€| you meant Mom."

Hiccup nodded. "So how areâ€| things between you two now?"

I turned my gaze to the ground, a little unsure what to think. Last night and this morning, Mom seemed, well, like she used to be, more...loose, more caring. Yet, every time I looked at her face, I can't just help but see her skin become dark scales and her massive eyes looking at me with a stern glare. If this was really all just some dream, I hoped it didn't become a nightmare. "Iâ€| can't believe she's really my Mom," I said.

Hiccup gave me a big grin. "Oh, good, I thought I was the only one. I mean, I've been wondering how Dad could have ever ended up with a toothpick of a boy like me. I mean, Mom looksâ€| well, like I could actually be her son."

I returned my own grin, my mood lightening. "So does that mean we should exchange parents?" I asked. Obviously, he was being serious with me. Obviously.

"We should!" Hiccup agreed wholeheartedly. It mean, it's not like we both shared the same Mom and Dad. I mean we just brothers, right?

It wasn't long after that conversation Hiccup and I had to separate, each of us going our separate ways for the rest of the day. I was admittedly a little disappointed my brother wasn't going to spend most of the day in Gobber's forges, but he was needed elsewhere. Besides, I'm sure he was looking forward to making some crazy project with me. It'd be the first time we would ever work on, well, anything as rough equals, as peers. That was worth the wait.

I passed under a small group of flying dragons, their shadows blocking the sun at erratic intervals. I guess, with the promise of, well, no longer being dragons, some were taking the opportunity to have what might have been their last chance to fly. A part of me wished I could join them.

Eventually, I found myself right at my cousin's home. I never been here before and I was a littleâ€| hesitant to go knock at the front, because my uncle was not exactly the nicest person in town. I mean, I know that Spitelout was my uncle, but I haven't exactly forgotten that our first meeting almost involved a sword fight. Still, I wasn't cowardâ€| or at least that's what I keep telling myself. I knocked at the door.

Footsteps hastily paced toward the door and the knob twisted open. A boy taller than me regarded me with surprise. "Uh...Nigh- Toothless,"

he corrected himself. "You're...here."

"Uh, hey Hookfang," I told the boy. Unlike with Stormfly or Meatlug, I didn't exactly well, see him as human, but that probably had to do with familiarity more than anything. "How's my cousin doing?"

"Um, well, my Lieg- Snotlout, well, uh," he kept stuttering on his own words.

"Just let me see," I asked.

Hookfang hesitated for a moment, but eventually gave in. He pushed open the door, just enough that I could see into the house.

Snotlout was, back to how he used to be when I first met, a just an ordinary, if overly built boy. I heard he ended up turning all Nightmare by the time I left. Apparently, Hiccup He had a big grin on his face, apparently glad to be well, having breakfast at the table. "So, Dad, you're letting me stay over for Snoggletog, right?"

Meanwhile, Spitelout, my uncle, regarded the beefy youth with a cold detachment that even I could feel from this distance. "Well, I suppose..."

Both of them were gathered at the eating table, in a situation not too unlike the one I just came from.

Hookfang closed the door enough just so that I could only see him through the crack. "Now's not exactly a good time though."

I frowned. "And why is that?" I mean, sure, my uncle wasn't exactly the most pleasant guy in the village, but well, he was always very dour as far as I knew. What made today any different?

Hookfang opened the door slightly again,

"-then, when Thawfest comes I'll bring home another trophy for the Jorgenson clan!" I heard Snotlout proudly declare. His arms were raised high up in the air as if he was already celebrating a victory months in advance.

My uncle only just looked as my cousin, his brow furrowing. "Maybe not this year," he said bleakly.

Snotlout's whole demeanor changed, his stance a little weighed down, his posture a little weary. "Uhâ€¦ I'm notâ€¦" he sounded so uncertain.

My uncle glowered at his son. "Well, maybe if you give it your bestâ€¦"

"I will!" Snotlout said, almost immediately. "I'll do that'll make you proud

Hookfang then stepped outside and closed the door behind him. "He's only just returned back home," he said to me. "We're both a littleâ€¦ desperate to earn his keep," said the tall boy.

I stepped back, feeling a little uneasy after looking atâ€¦ whatever

that was all about. Something in Snotlout's actionsâ€¦ just bothered me a little. I got that there were some sort of problems between him and his father, but I just didn't know why looking at it make me feel soâ€¦ weak. Well, he wasn't hurt or anything, so I guess that's a major point of contention. "Soâ€¦ he's fine, then?"

"I suppose," Hookfang admitted.

"Thanks," I told the boy. And then, I went on my way to a place I could take my mind off of what happened within that house. That was Snotlout's business, not mine.

* * *

><p>"So you're telling me that you've been betrayed by Camicazi, locked up by Alvin and then you proceeded to just leave after stealing possibly the most valuable items in his collection!?" I shouted after hearing that incredulous story I just heard. It was fanciful, dangerous, and the sort of thing that Mom and Dad would probably end up grounding me and my brother several times over.

Fishlegs gave me a flustered look. "Well, that's what happened!" claimed the blonde haired boy.

"Oh, I definitely believe you!" I said. And that was the problem. "Now, I just hope Dad doesn't!" I really did not want that story to be true, even if it meant that we did not actually have his magical spear or a map that served some special purpose of the Outcast's division. My parents were going to kill me for just letting this happen in the first place! I mean, I could have been the responsible older brother and stopped the whole thing from happening. I practically knew things were going to go haywire and poof, all I did was just let my brother nearly sail to his doom!

"Well, we haven't told himâ€¦ yet," admitted Meatlug.

"Please don't!" I begged for her. For the first time in my life, everything was going so perfectly, everything. I didn't want anything to go wrong.

Meatlug gave me a sheepish look. "Well, Camicazi did want out silence on the matter," she said.

I breathed out a sigh of relief. "Thank you," I said to the girl. So, maybe it was convient that Camicazi wanted to be secretive. Why? I'll ask that later. "Well, I guess you all made it out of that mess alright."

"Well, it wasn't all that bad!" exclaimed Fishlegs. "I mean, we're alive and didn't contract any diseases, so that's a victory, right?"

I nodded and then turned to the old wooden chest at the corner of the room. "You know what I have the hardest time believing?" I asked them.

The two of them shook their heads. "No, what would that be?"

I laughed placing my fingers over the indent in one of the metallic

corners. "Oh, nothing much, I just can't believe you took out a Nightmare using this thing."

"Me neither," Fishlegs replied, almost embarrassed to say it, like he wasn't proud at all to defeat a dragon only the best dragon hunters could faceâ€¦ not that dragon hunting was something to be proud about, anyways. I mean, dragons were still people, weren't they?

Meatlug blushed at the statement. "Well, that brute was bothering meâ€¦ Thankfully someone was there to remove him..."

Fishlegs's face turned an even brighter shade of red. "Oh, I was just, uh, doing, stuffâ€¦" the boy said hopelessly, his face looking down at the floor. Then, he slowly turned turned his gaze toward Meatlug and the two began looking each other in the eye.

I turned my gaze away from them, knowing full well this was not something I meant for my eyes. I mean, this was Fishleg's house, after all. Who was I to get in their way? I was just the son of the Chief, nobody really important.

As it turned out, there was somebody who felt they were important enough to ruin the moment. A sudden knock on the door interrupted what might have been a very touching moment. My two friends quickly turned their gazes away from each other, both looking quite embarrassed at the thought of what could have been.

"I'll get it!" I said to them. I marched over to the door and twisted the knob open.

The twins burst through, the wooden door slamming into my face and knocking me flat on my back. "Hey, guys!" cried the Tuffnut. "Welcome back!"

"Did you bring us any severed heads?" shouted Ruffnut.

Woozily, I hauled myself to my feet, feeling the wind knocked right out of me. Thankfully, I had a helping hand, or rather, a helping head. "For that, I am so making you two new talismansâ€¦" I said to the Zippleback.

Both heads, Barf and Belch, looked at me with gleeful expressions. "Well, you don't need to rush," said one head. Barf, I think.

"We don't mind being with each other," said the other. This one had to be Belch.

"You don't likeâ€¦ being seperated?" I asked. I mean, there were so few ways to call it.

Both heads crossed each other and then nodded their heads. "Well, not all the time," said Belch.

"It's just how we like to take thingsâ€¦" added Barf.

Then, both heads unknotted and then said, "Together."

"Together," I repeated, trying to understand the meaning of such a simple word. I didn't understand the Zippleback any more than I

understood the twins, bu

"Aw, come on, you didn't bring us any souvenirs!" cried Tuffnut.

"Even though you just came back from vacation?" yelled Ruffnut.

"We were captured by Alvin!" shouted Fishlegs. "It wasn't exactly a tourist trap!"

"But getting locked up in a real dungeon sounds like an awesome vacation!" said Ruffnut.

"And anyone who goes there is stuck there!" added her brother.

Fishlegs turned to me, hoping for me to deal with the twins for him. "Tuffnut does have a point; tourists don't leave," I said, taking a step back, a sheepish grin on my face. Hopefully, this plan of mine worked. It might have been a little cruel, but it was the only way to spare Fishlegs and Meatlug from the twins.

"Yeah, see that? Hiccup says I'm smart!" Tuffnut bragged.

"Pft, as if. _I'm _the smart one!" said his sister, slapping her brother away.

"I'm with Ruffnut on this one. She uses her head more often," I said.

"No she doesn't!" declared Tuffnut. And then, predictably, the blonde haired boy slammed his helmeted head at his sister's, causing her to stagger backward from the blow.

"Hey, why'd you do that for, you big idiot!" Ruffnut demanded, following up with her own cranial assault. Tuffnut staggered back.

"Now I'm not sure who uses their head more..." I asked no one in particular, but that was enough set the twins off.

They ran up to each other and rammed each other's heads in. A loud metallic clang that I was sure could be heard from outside the building rang out and the twins crumpled to the floor.

I know it might have been a little cruel of me to exploit their own nature against each other, but it was probably for the better. Besides, they looked so oddly peaceful sleeping there.

Fishlegs whistled. "Well, that takes care of thatâ€¦ I guess," muttered the boy.

Barf and Belch dragged the fallen bodies of their two friends and laid them close to one side.

"Hey, mind if we stay-"

"-here for a while?" both heads asked Meatlug, who then translated it to Fishlegs.

"Well, I guess it's not a problem if they're just napping," said Fishlegs.

"Good, problem solved!" I declared and then made my way to the door.

"Hey, Hiccup-" Fishlegs called out to me.

"Hey, no need to thank me, really!" I wasn't just being modest, I was being absolutely not proud of knocking out two of my friends.

Fishlegs shook his head. "You've got a nosebleed."

I blinked and lifted a hand to my upper lip and suddenly my index finger was coated in red fluid. Curiously, more of it was slowly trickling out from my left nostril. Shouldn't it have sealed up- Oh, that's right. Part of the price of being human again was the total suppression of the magical effect linked to what made me turn into a Night Fury. Since I had to completely suppress it, I did not have any increased strength or better bodily coordination and I certainly did not heal as fast I used to.

I took out a handkerchief in one of my pockets to stop the bleeding. "Uh thanks," I said in a nasally voice. It took a minute or two, but it finally stopped. Then, I took whatever necessary steps I needed to clean myself, Fishlegs and Meatlug disposed of the bloodied handkerchief. "I'll see you guys later, " I said once we were done. And then, I made my way out the door and into the streets.

The walk to Gothi's house was surprisingly pleasant. For the first time in my life, everyone seemed glad to see me. "Morning Hiccup!" shouted one man.

Another had. "How you doing?" I told him I was fine in the most pleasant manner I could

And still one more said to me, "Good morning!"

I know these pleasantries happened well, all the time, but this time, things were different. It wasn't that they were being polite this time. Now, they really did appear to be glad to see me.

As a result, I had a contented smile the rest of the way to the village elder's home, right up until I saw the flocks of dragons gathering around and making lines.

If the normal Vikings were pleased to see me, then the cursed Vikings were positively ecstatic. Each cried out my name, wondering when it was their turn to be return to human form. Maybe I shouldn't have told everyone that today was going to be the day Alvin's curse ended. I squeezed my way through, telling the dragons to wait just a bit longer. That didn't help in the least and once or twice I thought I was going to get trampled by someone vast bigger than me.

Eventually, I broke through them and made the climb up to the elder's home. Why someone so old had her home right on top of a small spiralling mountain was beyond me, but I immediately wished I had my wings just so I could skip the climb. Flying really made me spoiled,

didn't it?

After what must have been say five hundred years, I finally reached the wooden staircases and made the last few steps onto theâ€¦ yard, of the elder's home. What were you supposed to call a wooden platform suspended in the air in front of a small house like that? Gothi stood, overlooking the dragons below from her station.

Unfortunately for me, she wasn't the only one there. The old man Mildew stood right behind her, filling her ears with complaints. "-nd another thing!" he barked. "Just because one of _them_ can make them appear human doesn't mean that they're trustworthy!"

Gothi, apparently fed up, pointed at Mildew's mouth and then a jar of honey placed by the front door. I had the vague suspicion she was not offering the old man breakfast.

Mildew scowled. "You think this is funny!? I would have thought _you_ of all _people_ would see reason!"

The other elder lifted her staff and then gestured for him to walkâ€¦ right off the balcony.

Mildew got the message. He turned his back on the small old woman and began to make to climb down. He glared at me when he saw he and I quickly got out of the way. Mildew step even downward, complaining about how Berk was being 'corrupted' or how untrustworthy people who used to be dragons would be.

Then, once the rotten old man had stepped out of my line of sight, I approached Gothi.

The village elder turned looked at me as I stepped forward, her face perplexed and inquisitive. She was wondering what I was doing here.

I stepped forward, shivering as if I didn't have my winter vestments to protect me from the cold. I was actually quite scared of someone so small and so frail, since there were stories about her predicting when people died just by looking at their tongues. That, and I knew that she could destroy me with a word. I needed her advice, her reasoning to help me make a decision. "Should I do do?"

Gothi tilted her head at me, her eye squinting. She needed me to explain more.

"The dra-Vikings that Alvin cursedâ€¦ should I bind their spell today?" I asked her. While everyone was going the best it ever was in my family, I still didn't know if it was the sanest idea. The King gave me this power to bring my Mom home and undo the spell I put upon myself. Now, I was worried if changing the rest of the dragons back human would have been the smart thing to do. It was fair, yes, but Skullcrusher's words still rang through my head.

Gothi pursed her lips and looked thoughtfully down at the Vikings below as if wondering the same thing to. Then, the elder walked over to me and picked up my right hand handâ€¦ only to drop it in exchange for my left. I was scared to think she was reading my palms to predict when I'd die, but that was not the strangest thing I felt from her.

As she held onto my left hand, I felt a strange sensation, something like a fire, only very weak and dying down wrap around my limb. It wasâ€¦| Gothi, I knew immediately. She did have power. The elder frowned at me as if she found something she didn't like and backed away from me to oversee the dragons yet a second time.

"Soâ€¦| I should I do it or not?" I asked her. It might not have been the smartest thing ever, but well, I didn't know what she was thinking.

Gothi turned at me again, her expression tense. Then, looking at the dragons, she nodded her head up and down.

I breathed a sigh of relief. If Gothi approved, then everything was going to be fine. "Thank you," I told her with a bow of respect. And then, I began the trek downwards.

Admittedly, I was a little bothered by her actions when she wasâ€¦| examining me, but I didn't know what it was about. Why did she check my arms? And in fact, she did she see that made her so upset when she did?

I sighed, realizing how stupid I was being for looking a gift horse in the mouth. Well, there were definitely going to be less dragons on Berk. Though, I still wasn't sure if that was a good thing.

* * *

><p>We're nearing the end of this arc, but we still have plenty of stuff left to do.

ivanganev1992: I know you want me to email you, but this website does not allow the posting of links or addresses as a very harsh antispam deterrent. If you check your reveiws that you left me, they have removed any references to... whatever it is you wanted me to see. I am sorry, but that's just how it works. There is already a Private Messaging system on the website. Just access your account here and you should be able to access it. I've already sent you some things to converse about a while back.

25. Chapter 25

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

**Another chapter earlier than it should have. **

I'm not going to focus on saying things about it too much, for that you'll have to read in.

Also, please enjoy and leave comments if you liked this piece.

* * *

><p>I sat with my back against the frozen wall, my heart pounding and ready for action. It's been a while since I've felt the tension in my muscles, the pounding rush in my breath, but never have I felt so alive. I peered through the corner, daring to face my enemy.<p>

"Get down!" I heard someone scream from behind me.

I quickly ducked behind cover yet again, just in time to dodge a projectile that zipped past where my head was. That was a close one, any closer I would have been a goner. I gritted my teeth, glad to face defeat with nothing but glee.

Across the road from me was Astrid, also hiding behind someone else's home. That wonderful maiden then declared, her weapons raised high and aimed at our advancing foes. "Fall back!" She ran behind, retreating but clearly no coward.

"But, what if I don't!" argued Tuffnut. "Hey-Ow!" That earned him a slap from my hand, pushing him out to the lines of fire, making him follow that order whether he wanted to or not.

"Heh!" scoffed his sibling, before running off after the other girl. "You deserved that!"

Yeah, there was almost no question she was the one fit to lead. I fell back, at her order, that's what counted. I dodged the various strikes of our enemies and tumbled behind some well, the snow cushioning my fall. Not that I cared, worrying about scraping a leg? Only a chumps did that.

I turned back to see my foe's advance, only to find that someone straggling behind at our commander's whims.

"Hey guys, wait up!" shouted that little runt Hiccup. He was dead last, pinned down behind some overturned wheelbarrow and receiving enemy fire.

"Hiccup!" barked Astrid. She flung her weapons at the enemy, but to no avail. She grunted, obviously frustrated. Then, she turned to me and suddenly knew I was being given the hardest order of my entire life. "Snotlout, save Hiccup!"

On the one hand, my cousin was a runt a weakling who against all odds somehow managed to survive this long. I sometimes wished we weren't related, but that was the decree of the gods. On the other hand, saving his skin let me score points with Astrid and let me show off just how good I was. I mean, just being around him gave me plenty of chances to prove myself!

. Hiccup was still pinned behind his cover, still facing enemy fire with both hands clasped over his ears. "A little help here!" he shouted.

I thought about it a moment more. I guess it hasn't been too bad being related to him, especially lately, since he let- On the other hand it was his fault _she _left me behind.

"Snotlout!" Astrid barked. I jolted into action, my mind made up. Astrid's orders were important!

Alright, Snotlout, this is the moment you've been waiting for. Make her proud. I dashed forward, wishing I had a shield to protect me! No, that was for cowards, I wasn't a coward!

My foes threw everything they had at me as I dove in, going full speed at my target. I screamed, charging at them, tearing up snow as I went along. I wasn't going to back out, I wasn't going to be afraid of them and their attacks. My cousin, no, everyone, looked at me gazes of disbelief; I was going to do it.

As I got closer near my cousin, I also went closer to my enemies. Their attacks getting more frequent, more vicious with every step. But I didn't fear, no, I _enjoyed it. _I leapt off my feet and slid the rest of the way on my belly, my lower profile doing most of the work for me!

"Snotlout!" shouted my cousin as I slammed my back back to the wheel.

"How you doing, Cuz!?" I shot him a look, ready to face our enemy.

"Uhâ€¦ great," he said, uncertain. "... now I'm sure I'm savedâ€¦"

I glowered, mostly internally. Why did he always have to do that? Why didn't he see I was on his side? I mean, all I wanted to do was just show him how awesome I was while saving him. But, I guess I shouldn't that bother me. Gotta keep appearances after all and tough guys like shouldn't let what others think of them affect their choices.

I picked up my weapons and flung them at my attackers, blindly throwing them at any who dared get close. One, no, two of them advanced forward, blasting the wheelbarrow's side. But I didn't let that deter me. I keep at it, managing to land a hit on one and managing to keep the other from advancing.

"Snotlout, we should go..." Hiccup said, still cowering behind the wagon, only managing to take quick peaks every now and again. I was mostly fine with him staying like that; it meant more Glory for me. But retreating here was not an option.

"We're winning!" I declared. "Come on, be a man!" I told my cousin. I mean, he beat that big dragon. Why couldn't he face the Dragons?

"But-"

"No buts!" I shouted, still flinging. At the rate I was going I was sure I could take them all out, just so long as I- Something hit the side of my face, sending me toppling to the ground. I tried to get up, tried to reach to fight back, but it was no use. I was down and I knew it. They got me and now, now I was-

"Out!" shouted a woman's voice. "Dragons win a point."

I heard an uproar of excited shouts blaring from all around me. I got up, blinking. Then, I brushed snow from my face, suddenly feeling like a big moron. There were men and women, boys and girls, all gathered to watch the little spectacle all talking in excited whispers over that big blunder I just madeâ€¦ was forced to make. Especially since he was-

I turned to Hiccup, who flashed sheepish me grin on his face. "...I was going to say, Stormfly and Toothless had their sights on you." he

told me.

I got up and peered out at my two enemies, each giving each other looks of satisfied cheer.

"Yeah!" said Toothless, raising his hand up in excitement. "I got him!"

"Teamwork!" I heard Stormfly shout before quickly slapping her palm against my cousin's. They were clearly enjoying feeling me.

"Snotlout, I told you to get Hiccup, not stand there and get hit!" I heard Astrid scream at me across the field. "Now we're down a man because you decided to play hero!"

I glowered Hiccup who just inched back slightly at my gaze. I wouldn't even have need to save his skin if he wasn't dragging the whole team down. Shoulda' been him that got hit! Why was he even in this game?

"Better get out area, nephew!" the woman shouted. "Fighting's stopped while you're still there!"

I grumbled, but didn't complain. I didn't want to make a scene, not with- I shook my head. Both of Hiccup's parents were watching the game, cheering him on despite the fact that he was taking refuge behind a fallen piece of farm equipment. Besides, I needed to smoulder over this.

I walked out of the street and the snowball fight resumed right where it left off, just as if I wasn't even there in the first place. I sat by the chairs set up near my aunt, the so called 'Outzone', the place where those weaklings go to when they are taken captive. and I didn't belong here.

I locked my eyes at the ongoing snowball fight, waiting for my turn to show them what I am made of. Hopefully, any moment now the game would end and I could finally get back in.

I felt so angry that I wish I could breathe fire again. Why did Hiccup always have to ruin everything for me? I mean, it's only gotten worse since we came turned back! Astrid, the village, everyone, they just-

Hookfang approached me, scooting his chair over noisily until I was back in the real world again. "Uh. nice shooting there. taking me down," he said, admitting defeat with a bow.

"Yeah, I guess," I muttered to the taller boy. At the very least, I went down after I took someone down. I didn't feel like talking, not when there was something more important to focus on.

"Alright, better get a move on!" ordered Astrid, just as if she was actually leading a force of well trained Viking warriors. "Take no prisoners and rescue Hiccup!"

"I'm fine!" my cousin shouted back at her. "Really!"

"You're not gonna be!" said my other cousin. Toothless was at least

somewhat better than his brother, since even I had to admit, he was good at _something _Vikings should be proud of. I mean, not just anyone could take me down. He shot out snowballs in seemingly random directions as if they were shooting stars. Anyone who got in the way of his aim had to duck behind cover or else be taken out of the game.

"Break the line! We're not leaving him!" shouted Astrid, hiding behind a wall.

"Really, you don't have to come save me!" shouted Hiccup. At the very least, he knew how useless he was in a fight. I honestly think he should have _stayed _a dragon, at least then no one could call him a runt.

"Go on, Hiccup! Beat your brother!" shouted my uncle.

"Dad!" shouted both my cousins. Apparently.

"Just so long as you have fun!" shouted my new aunt.

"Winning is fun!" declared my uncle. He then bent over to the man who stood by his side. "Aint that right-"

Quickly, I turned away and back to the game. No, not right now.

"Uh.. my Leigeâ€|" asked the confused boy who sat beside me.

"Not now Hookfang," I said. "Can't you see I'm busy!"

Of all the combatants that were on the field, only two were reluctant. "I'm sorry I have to do this!" shouted Fishlegs. For someone who was so big and gifted with good arms, he had absolutely pitiful throws. He was the nearest to Hiccup, but his throws weren't even getting past my cousin.

Meatlug wasn't much better. The girl, for whatever reason had terrible, absolutely terrible hand eye coordination. It was like she was hitting something that was standing right next to Fishlegs. "I'm sorry too!"

They kept throwing each other, futilely to such a degree that the only thing they seemed to be good for was to provide a moving wall to protect those beside them.

Then in a flash, Meatlug went taken out by a hailstorm of white. She went down without much fuss.

"Hold still so we can hit you!" shouted Tuffnut aiming at Barf. Fishlegs was only just in the way when it happened.

Ruffnut agreed. "What he said!"

Fishlegs then went down, his own body used as a shield by the twins to escape their foes.

The twins were going after Barf and Belch with everything they had in them. Volleys upon volleys of snowballs were being thrown nonstop from both sides. Whenever one of the members of either duo emptied

his or her hands, the other one hastily gathered snow to throw while the other went to fill his or her hands. It was strange to see Tuffnut and Ruffnut working together so fluidly, that I almost had a hard time telling either of them apart save for their outfits.

"Those are my kids there!" declared Tuffnut Sr., Tuffnuts father.

"You're-"

"-going down!" declared Barf and Belch their own hail of white not letting p.

"No, you're going up!" spat Ruffnut.

"Yeah! Hey, wait..." replied her brother.

"Soâ€¦| Dragons versus Vikings," I heard Hookfang speak to me.

I turned to him. "Yeah," I muttered. "My aunt's idea." She the referee and I actually felt like getting in her good graces. She was Valhallarama, a famed Viking warrior and a long lost relative; what's not to like about? Well, she used to be a dragon, but hey, so did I. Sure, she did look like Hiccup, but that's where the similarities between the two ended. Just how was a runt like him related to either of us?

The two larger teens were making their way back to us, both clearly glad to be free from the conflict.

"Let'sâ€¦| try not to fight again," said Fishlegs.

Meatlug nodded. "Let's."

Just looking at the two of them reminded me of someone I didn't get to see much of. Hookfang's sister didn't even have so much as a name, but I've been wondering how she was doing after she left. I know, I shouldn't, but hey, that was just me

The assembled villagers all breathed a collective gasp. I turned back to the street. Barf, Belch, Ruffnut, and Tuffnut were all taken out one after another. They all left the field, but at the same time, they kept pelting each other with snow as they left, apparently deciding the game was too fun to just stop.

"Now it's just the boysâ€¦| and their _girls!_" declared my uncle.

The crowd all laughed at the teasing, but it my heart feel heavy just thinking of those words. In my head, I knew he was joking, messing with his kids, but in my heart, there was something else. All of my life, I've been the best Viking youth in my family. And throughout most of that, I've been wanting to get Astrid's attention. She _was _the best in everything, as far as I was concerned. We _should_ have made a perfect pair for each other. Yetâ€¦| now, I shuddered to think of the possibility that Astrid would fall for that wimp. Yeah, yeah, I get that Hiccup's got powers and all, but so did I! _I _forced Alvin off the island.

No, that can't have been true. I mean, sure they spent some time together, but they were not, well, a pair. I mean, I spent time with Hookfang all the time!

Someone else was apparently every bit as upset as I was. "I am not _his_" shouted Stormfly.

"Hah!" Astrid shouted. "You're a terrible liar you know!" For that, Stormfly shot her a look and a flurry of snow.

My cousin Toothless was about to enter in and aid the girl, but Stormfly slapped the snow out of his hands.

"Stay out of this!" barked Stormfly.

"Butâ€¦ I'm helping?" questioned my confused cousin.

Stormfly just slapped herself in the face and then began throwing. "Just go hit your brother.

"But-"

"Now!" she ordered.

I whistled. Okay, someone was definitely more upset by my uncle than I was. Stormfly was good at throwing, her shots quick and precise.

Astrid barreled in and jumped in behind the wheel barrel Hiccup hid in for practically the whole game.

"Astrid!" shouted my cousin.

"Hey, is there room here?" laughed Astrid. Normally, I liked listening to her joyful sounds, but now, I couldn't help but feel like something in me was being strangled.

"Uhâ€¦ noâ€¦"

Meanwhile, Snowballs kept getting thrown at them, uselessly bouncing off the wheelbarrow. Both stopped eventually, realizing they couldn't hit either of their targets.

"I told you to not get involved!" shouted Stormfly.

"They're in the same spot!" said any semblance of working together had fallen apparent because of my uncle's words.

There was a tense moment in the air as both sides of the conflict had reached a relatively even point. One side was unable to attack but also unable to fight back, while the other could fight back yet couldn't make those attacks matter.

"Alright, now that we're down to two combatants on each side, the dividing line separating Team Vikings from Team Dragons will be removed!" shouted my aunt.

"Hah, now things will get really fun!" shouted my uncle. "Ain't that right-"

I turned away. I did not want to look at him, not listen to him, not when I was taken out so early in the game.

I turned back to the game just in time to hear my aunt say. "Now, are you ready boys?"

And then, things changed. Toothless and Stormfly slowly approached the wheelbarrow, cautious but armed. I knew from what little I knew about how strategy worked that this was a dangerous spot. They could easily finish off their enemies, but if Astrid or- No, there was no way Hiccup was going to change the outcome. It was all on Astrid's shoulders. She was the one who mattered, not the dead weight. It all came down to a single, savage moment.

The red haired girl nodded something to my cousin and they approached.

And then Astrid jumped out and hit Stormfly squarely in the chest.

Yet, at the same time, she threw her own snowball, hitting Astrid in the shoulder.

"Out!" my aunt declared for both of them.

Both of them left the field, Stormfly giving Astrid an annoyed expression, while that beautiful maiden kept beaming satisfied smiles.

Now it was down to the two brothers.

I thought to myself of all of the possible ways this could all play out. I mean, Toothless was the obvious superior. I guess if I spun things the right way, I could say that I was taken out so early because I was the most dangerous target. He was guaranteed to win from here! "You know, bud, you could have tried to help her out!" my cousin taunted.

"I did warn her not to do that!" said Hiccup. "She could have waited until you were close enough.

"And then you let her go!" said Toothless, stepping forward until he was right in front of the snowpiled wheel barrel.

"I don't control her!" said Hiccup. "I mean, I like her, but that I doesn't make her choices for her..."

"Right!" Toothless said absent, almost absentmindedly. He ready his snowballs and made one last step forward. "So, bud, you giving-"

"Nope!" interrupted Hiccup before leaping out from the cover that protected him through the whole game.

Toothless's hand automatically took aim and shot one last sphere of white at Hiccup, but my cousin was surprisingly quick. He dropped to one side, deftly dodging the snowball.

And then it was practically over. Toothless missed and even Hiccup couldn't miss at these ranges.

Hiccup was armed and waiting and Toothless didn't have time for a second hit.

When I opened my eyes, Toothless had a smear of white coating his black fur vest.

"Shouldn't have come closer, bud!" declared Hiccup, dusting the snow that stuck to his coat.

Toothless laughed and threw his brother another snowball, despite the fact the game was over. "Vikings win round one!" shouted my uncle, grabbing my cousin and hoisting him over his head like he was some sort of trophy.

All of my friends went to go congratulate my victorious cousin. I didn't and stayed at my seat, waiting for the next round to begin.

And then someone approached me. I knew who, but I didn't want to look. "Hey Dad," I said glumly.

"You got out at early, first casualty on your side," my father muttered. "Coulda at least got another one out before you went down you knowâ€|"

I wanted to say that this was just a game, that it wasn't important, but no, it was important, especially for him. "I'll do better in the next roundâ€|" I promised.

"You betterâ€|" murmured my father. "Family's got to keep up appearances, you knowâ€|"

"I'll be the MVP," I assured him, even though I secretly knew that was hardly going to happen. All the uproar my cousin received made it hard to think I'd get any of that.

My Dad glowered at me, "Honestly, why couldn't you be more like Hiccup? At least, he's bringing victory to his family." Those words hurt me more than any fire ever did. I should know, I've been through one. And then he walked off, leaving me with a lump in my chest.

All my life, I was certain I would be the best Viking that ever was, that so long as I did what a Viking should do. A Viking should be strong and brave, be tough and unrelenting. And because I stuck to those ideals, my Dad cheered me on, the villagers celebrated me every Thawfest. Everything should have been perfect. I used to laugh at Hiccup at a kid, thinking he would never amount to anything, since he was the worst Viking I ever known. He was cautious most of the time, doing things like 'experimentation' and recently 'sorcery'.

Then, things changed. When I started coming under the curse, slowly people turned away from me, looking at me with revulsion and discomfort. Dad, well, he did what was right of him to do, especially when I decided to justâ€| accept I wasn't going to be human again. Now, after returning to human form, I felt like I could have my life back, everything. I could even taste bread the right way!

Yet, it wasn't happening. Dad, well, he was Dad. But everyone else, the Villagers, Astrid, I was a nobody now.

"Snotloutâ€|" I heard a voice call out to me.

"Hey Hookfang," I said wearily.

"You don't have to put up with this stuffâ€|" he told me. I didn't really know what he meant by that. Yet, an idea formed in my head, one that clearly worked before.

I looked at the assembled crowd. Everyone was breaking up and heading back to their seats. The next round was about to begin and I knew it was time for me to take my place.

"No, I don't," I told Hookfang.

One thing was for certain, I was going to do better at round two.

And I wasn't just talking about snowball fightsâ€|

* * *

><p>I hung the shield and hammered it into place. Then, without even looking, I grabbed another shield that suddenly appeared behind me and hammered that shield next to the previous one. Then, once I ran out of nails and places to put the shields in, I slid down the ladder to greet Stormfly. "So, are you ready?"

The red haired girl frowned at me, "I suppose, Astrid, I suppose," she said gloomily. She knew what I was talking about and it upset her.

"Hey, you know I was only joking!" I told her. I mean, it's only been an hour or so since the morning's games and for reasons I couldn't quite fathom she's been acting a little off kilter ever since the Chief- No, there's no way. I mean, the Chief was obviously joking. Hiccup and I, well, we've become close friends over the past few months, but that didn't mean that wereâ€|well, an us. I seriously doubted Stormfly and Toothless were one as well.

The red haired girl slowly nudged the ladder several paces to the right and out of the way. "I know, butâ€| it bothers me."

I snorted then putting the hammer in a toolbox and moved it to where the ladder now stood. "A joke like that bothers you?" I laughed.

"Well, aren't you?" she said. "I mean, plenty of people thing, wellâ€|"

I rolled my eyes. "Hiccup and I are friends, good friends, not in that kind ofâ€| relationship."

"And he wishes it was moreâ€|"

"And so does every boy except Fishlegs within a five mile radius," I counted. Really, I think Stormfly would understand my situation more if she spent most of her life being hounded by 'admirers'. Really, I'm surprised Stormfly didn't have some of her own, I mean, she was beautiful, both in human and dragon form! Justâ€| not _that_

beautiful.

Stormfly just shook her head. "Right, well, I suppose I should get the yak milk then for thatâ€¦"

"Yaknog," I supplied. "I'll meet you back home so we can begin." It was an idea I thought up, maybe something to celebrate the changes that happened this year. I figured if things were changing, maybe a new tradition was in order.

Stormfly went on her way to a nearby store to fetch the fresh yak milk. It wasn't too far away, but there was a bit of a line as other people had their own preparations to make for the upcoming end of the week.

As for me, I was going to bake some bread while she was away. Hopefully, it doesn't end up having use as an impromptu hammer.

Moving through town I found myself feeling strangely awed of howâ€¦ normal everything had suddenly become. Most of the dragons that I grown accustomed to seeing fly over head were no longer able to fly. Instead, they walked down the streets, clothed and not looking any different from anyone else..

"Morning!" shouted one man.

"Morning!" I waved my hand back at him. He was a Gronckle if I recalled.

A few steps closer and I found myself facing other, former dragons all enjoying themselves in whatever way they could. Nadders, Gronckles, Nightmares, and especially the Terrors; pretty much every type of dragon ended up losing most of their numbers.

It's been a few weeks since Hiccup came and practically undid everything with the power the King gave him, I should have been overjoyed, overwhelmed and glad I was not going to turn into some freak of nature. Yet I couldn't help but feel a littleâ€¦ disturbed being in Berk. I didn't know why, but something in me bothered.

I turned upwards to see the dragon flying overhead. Roland the Thunderdrum was one of the few people who opted not to change back when Hiccup first offered. He said he's gotten used to his new life style and he doesn't exactly need to feed anyone but himself, so he didn't need to change back so soon.

I admittedly felt a littleâ€¦ jealous of him flying up there. I've only been a Nadder for a few hours, weeks ago, but even now I couldn't help but focus on how much I missed sensation of flying. It was like, I was giving up something important by forsaking that form...

"Am I bothering you?" I heard a voice next to me say.

My focus shifted back to the world and I turned to my side to see Hiccup's Mom walking right next to me. "Uh, no, you're not, uhâ€¦ Fl-", I shook my head. I didn't know what to call her. I mean, I could call her 'Hiccup's-and-slash-or-Toothless's Mom', 'Chief's Wife', or simply 'Miss' or 'Ma'am', but I didn't think either of

those were the right thing to call her.

She grinned and I found my confusion strangely evaporating, like some sort of drain in the bottom of my heart was being opened. "You can call me 'Val', if you'd like."

"Alright, Val," I replied. If I was a little girl, I think I would have been doing backflips and cartwheels in giddy excitement. I mean, this was one of my heroes growing up and well, getting to call her an endearing term like that was something that excited me more than it should have.

"Of course, depending on how things go, you might just end up having to call me 'Mother-in-Law'."

I laughed. The joke hasn't exactly worn out its welcome, so I still found it funny. "I like Val better," I replied.

"As do I," said the older woman.

"So how has everything been?" I asked her. I haven't exactly had much time to talk to her alone ever since we left the King's domain, so as much as I knew it wasn't wise to get in other people's affairs, I was so curious to know what was going on with her.

A warm smile dawned on her face. "Better than I ever hoped," she replied. "You know the village is celebrating my return by letting me the festivities during Snoggletog."

I nodded. "Well, you are a great Viking hero. We don't get a lot of those these days."

"I don't know, I'm sure there's plenty of _younger_ people who are better suited to the job," she suggested and I think I had a feeling she and I both were thinking the same things. "But as for my family, my sons both love me, though my youngest still can't look me in the eyes."

"I'm sure Toothless will come around," I said to her. "I didn't much like him when we met, but eventually I warmed up to her." Maybe with a little luck, my words could encourage her, just as well as her actions did so for me a moment before.

"Maybe you're right," admitted Val. "And for my husband...Well, Stoick, hasn't changed since I last saw him." Then she frowned and I suddenly got the feeling the unspoken words were: "And I hope things remain unchanged when I finally tell him the truth."

I didn't fully understand what went on through my childhood hero's mind, but I had a vague idea it couldn't have been good. She spent over a decade as an enemy of the Tribe because she wanted to survive the world her curse set her through. Now that she was back home, the only reason she hasn't faced judgement is because everyone who knew kept shut about it.

So I did the only thing a sane person in my position would do; I changed the topic. "So, I'm going to be making some lunch to give to your boys!" I said cheerfully. Home was only a stone's throw away now.

Valhallarama mused. "Well, I'm sure they could use a snack since they've been working in Gobber's forge all day..."

I nodded. Once there was no one left to break to break curses for, both brothers went back to ordinary blacksmithing to pass the time and to test their skills. I mean, it wasn't like either of them needed to go further and learn more about sorcery, or at least, not yet at least. "I've got this thing called yaknog I want to show them!"

"Yaknog?"

I nodded my head and I almost felt like I'd make a fool of myself in public if I shook it even faster. "A new holiday tradition, starting this year!" The older woman looked thoughtful, obviously wondering about that. "It's going to be a beverage made from yak milk, eggs, and flour!" I explained.

"Flourâ€|?" she looked at me inquisitively. "Wouldn't sugar be better?"

I blinked. The thought hadn't crossed my mind, mostly because sugar wasn't exactly something all too common on Berk. Only the merchants seemed to have that stuff and it wasn't exactly cheap. I thought flour would work, make it, I don't know, taste better? I mean, bread tasted good, and it was made of flour. "Uh, maybeâ€|" I admitted, not sure what to say.

"Maybe I should help you thenâ€|" said Val, a small smirk on her face.

A part of me would have been too proud to let her help, but on the other hand, was I really going to turn her down? I mean, this was Valhallarama, Valka, Val, the hero I was getting to aid me. "Okay," I said, a big grin that I could barely keep a hold of formed on my face. Then, I lead her in.

* * *

><p>This chapter is mildly important. It provides some information as well as works on building up characters and motivations for the upcoming things.

Hope to see you again.

26. Chapter 26

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Sorry this chapter took longer than usual. I had things in the way, but I've got this chapter up before things became too late.

Anyways, there's another vote, the details of which are on the bottom.

Please read and reveiw. Enjoy what's below. See you.

* * *

><p>I hate the cold. Just when I think I've finally gotten used to the frigid air freezing my nostrils over, I find out that Snoggletog was held on the coldest day of the year. I shivered just thinking how much worse things were going to get in a few hours; even with my fur jacket partially covering me, I could still feel the blistering cold. "Canâ€| Weâ€| Hurry?" I managed to speak through my chattering. My legs felt icy stiff, like they might have frozen during the hour I spent standing at this spot. The only thing that I was sure keeping me alive was the fact that I wasn't alone.<p>

"Nonsense, boy!" cried my Dad, holding his massive arms tightly around shoulder. He was dressed in his finest mail and his favorite helmet, both polished for the occasion. He bellowed, excitedly, "It's been years since the whole family together for a family painting and it'll be your first with us! We can't miss an opportunity like this!"

"Can't we have done this, some place warmer?" While I understood that having a family portrait would have been nice to have to celebrate the fact that we were a united whole, I still didn't get why we didn't do this some place saner, like _indoors_. "I feel like I'm going to turn into a frozen Toothless-sickle!"

Dad laughed. "Don't worry boy, you're perfectly safe here!"

Glancing across from my Dad, I saw Hiccup roll his eyeballs. "Oh, I am sure no one died waiting for their painting to be takenâ€| if you forget about those five people who all died that one year."

"Hey! That was a snowstorm and the Chief was drunk!" protested our father.

"I don't know, Dad, you did spend quite alot of time with Gobber last nig-" added Hiccup, a slight grin on his face. My brother did not have armor, but he had his own helmet. Mom actually had a funny comment to say about it since it was essentially made from her armor.

"That was for something else!" beamed Dad. Though I think his cheeks were starting to turn pink again despite the color having drained out of them half an hour ago.

Meanwhile, while all that was going on, I kept shivering, the only noise I made were the chattering of my teeth. Of all the things I have come to miss about being a dragon, it was simply the ability to not be cold.

"Don't worry, sweetie," I heard from behind ,e. Slender arms wormed their way around my neck, and a warm body was packed tight against my sides.

My shivering slowed, enough that I could actually speak. "Thanks...Momâ€|" I told her as I turned towards her.

"It'll all be over soon, just hang tight," she said with a curt grin on her face. It's gotten easier to trust in her the past few weeks, enough that I can at least put aside some of theâ€| bad history between us like it was some sort of fading nightmare. Now, I could

actually see her, not someone else I was scared of. My Mom's warmth was welcome, especially even now.

I turned to our painter. Bucket stood in front of us, his hands coated in greasy substances from the wooden plate held to his chest. He rapidly touched his paint encrusted fingers over a wooden shield on a stand, placing blacks, browns, greens, and other colors onto it. The whole process would have been faster if the paint didn't freeze every few minutes.

Bucket focused on my parents, giving them a focused look on over what he should do with them. Hopefully that meant the painting was nearing its completion.

"Uh, Bucket, maybe you should do that over again," said his accomplice, Mulch. t The shorter man eyed the shield's image, albeit hesitantly.

"But-" complained Bucket. "I-"

"I don't think the Chief will like that picture very much," added Mulch.

I couldn't see what he was talking about, but right now I didn't care so much. "Oh, I'm sure it's fine! Really!" I said, my teeth still managing to vibrate between words. I didn't even check to see if the picture was fine or not, I was already convinced that I wanted to get out of here right away as fast as I could. Starting over was not conducive to that.

Dad grunted. "I'll be the judge of that, but I'm not paying you for a second painting!"

"But, Dad, you aren't paying them in the first place," added Hiccup.

Father's head shifted towards my brother a hearty laugh that I felt erupting from his chest. "Well, if I was paying them, I wouldn't be paying for a second painting!" he laughed.

"Hm, wonder how why they're painting then..." mused Mom.

"Oh, uh, just wanted toâ€¦" said Bucket, his hand smeared with red and. "...welcome you home."

I could feel Mom's smile without even looking. The air felt like it was several degrees warmer than it should have been. "Well, thank you," replied Mom.

Bucket and Mulch both bowed in respect for her. "I still think the painting as is might beâ€¦ problematic," said the shorter man.

"I'm sure it's fine!" I said again, but I was sure no one was really listening to me.

"If it's that much of a big deal, I'llâ€¦ check it out," said Hiccup, slipping through our father's massive arms. He took a deep breath as if he had been suffocating under my dad's pits and then ran off.

"Alright, but hurry back, boy!" shouted our father.

"Please do!" I added. Already I was missing Hiccup's presence, but that might just have been the cold air moving against my side.

Hiccup then slipped behind Bucket while he was still painting. His expression turned into one of perplexed hesitance. "That, could be a problemâ€¦" said my brother.

Internally, I groaned. Whatever it was my brother and Mulch were concerned about, it meant one thing that I could think of: more time spent outside. "What is it?" I said. I was hesitant to get out from my parents' arms and exposing more of my body to the freezing air, but I think my own impatience got the better of me. And then, my annoyance turned melted directly into wordless confusion.

Hiccup moved close to me while I stood there dumbfounded. "Yeah, it's definitelyâ€¦ odd," said my brother.

"Is it...bad?" wondered our father.

"Sort of," Mulch said. "He's been having this problem ever sinceâ€¦ well, they know." I saw him eye Hiccup and me and that was all the prompting I needed to shake the confusion from my head. Maybe I was just so slow because everything about me was freezing inside and out.

Finally, I averted my gaze from the painting, unsure of what to really make of it. I know Bucket might have had some uniqueâ€¦ issues, but I had difficulty understanding how any of this, most especially my childhood nightmare, related to a man's ability to paint. I suppose he knows about Mom because ofâ€¦ he knew what happened to his friend, but I somehow doubted that leap of logic could suddenly occur to him. And how was he able to know someone he knows was a dragon in the first place? How exactly does a disabled man know about _any _of these things? "Uh, do you mind?" I asked the man.

Then, stepping back with a disgruntled frown on his face, Bucket let me turn the portrait around completely.

Mom and Dad's eyes lit up, looks of bewilderment clear across our faces. "That's definitely...unique..." Mom muttered.

Hiccup and I both turned to each other, our expressions clearly in agreement. That was the biggest understatement either of us heard our mother speak.

The painting on the shield did not feature a seemingly normal Viking family in a blank background looking forward. Instead, there were dragons, four of them in the places were; well, three and a half dragons, since Dad wasn't all the way in yet. The two Night Furies in the bottom were the smallest of the group and were clearly meant to represent Hiccup and was looming above us, bigger, but not so much we were dwarfed by her size. Dad was behind her, his form though incomplete, was very reminiscent of a Monstrous Nightmare.

Both of my parents looked at the picture with a very small hint of awe, but Dad gave Mom a tense look as if wondering something. While

it was plainly clear to our father that both me and Hiccup were the lesser Night Furies, the fact that Mom was also being represented by a Night Fury was probably a bit of a surprise to our father. No one, especially not me, was willing to discuss where Mom had been for the past few years. "Nice painting, isn't it?" my mother said hesitantly.

"Uh, yeah," agreed my Dad. Then, his smile reappeared on his lips and he burst out laughing, as if he heard the funniest joke in Midgard. "Look at us, we're dragons!" he shouted, pointing at the picture.

Hiccup and I both looked at each other, wondering if maybe we should tie our father to a mast and send him out to sea.

"Uh, Dad?" Hiccup said, approaching him first; I wasn't far behind. We both came to immediately regret that.

Dad engulfed us in his arms and lifted us in the air like we were stuffed toys. "Look, boys, a family of dragons!" he laughed.

"Uh, Dad, we're not dragons," I said, feeling like I should point out the obvious in a time like this, even though I knew well what my brother would say next.

"Well, we're not," Hiccup said, strangely nonchalant about being lifted up in the air.

"And I'm still not sure if I'm going to turn or not!" declared our father. Unlike all the others cursed by Alvin, Dad still hadn't completely turned into a dragon. It was so slow, that most of the time, it took things like measurements to actually tell if his condition was actually progressing. It was for this reason and the fact that Hiccup and I had no idea what would happen if we tried to break the spell upon him that we haven't come around to using the magic to break him.

Father then spun us around excitedly a few times before setting us down onto the ground. I found my legs suddenly turn into wet bread and I dizzily paced away before Mom caught me and allowed me to regain my balance. "Uh, Stoick," Mom called out. "So, what about the painting?"

Dad laughed again, whatever joke was going through his head apparently still the funniest thing he ever heard. "It's a great painting," he said, his smile wide enough that I was sure it didn't fit on his face. "You look great as a Night Fury," he said, pointing to the image that represented it Mom.

Mom, flustered, backed away. "It's, a painting," she replied.

"Well, yeah," Father admitted.

"And I'm not a Night Fury," said Mom.

For a moment, I imagined that Dad might have pieced everything together, that he knew the big secret Mom had been keeping since she arrived. "No, of course, not," Dad admitted. "...But if you were a Night Fury, I think you'd be the quite beautiful." Thankfully, those

those subsided. It didn't sound like he knew, or he did, he wasn't telling.

Mom's expression then shifted into a more vicious smile, he confidence restored. "Bah! You say that about me wherever have bad mornings!"

"Well, I'm not lying am I?" questioned Dad.

Hiccup then stepped in. "Uh, guys, the painting," my brother reminded us, pointing to Bucket who was standing that gaping at the whole scene.

"Oh, right," said Dad.

"We should," said Mom.

"And so we can get out of this cold," I added.

As soon as my family went back into realignment, Bucket continued his work on the painting. It wasn't long after that that the painting was done.

"Alright, it's done!" declared Mulch.

"Finally!" I said, brushing the faint covering of frost.

Dad and Hiccup stepped forward to receive the completed shield emblazoned with black and red dragons. "So, maybe I'll turn into a Nightmare," Dad muttered aloud, taking the shield from its owner.

"It'd be certainly interesting!" declared Mulch, like it was some sort of trophy.

"And also having to do with the night!" Hiccup pointed out, as obvious as it was. Dad patted Hiccup on head for that pun.

Mom and I approached just behind the other two.

"Soâ€¦ to the Great Hall right?" I questioned, anxiously waiting to get out of the cold air. The sun was setting now and the darkness was just going to make things even colder in just a moment.

"Aye," said my Mom.

"Then, what are we waiting for!" I declared, leaping forward a few steps in the direction of the Great Hall.

But I found my steps immediately when I found Hiccup tugging at my coat sleeves. "Hey, not so fast, bud!" my brother declared. "Mom's got some business still."

I snorted, but turned around to find my Mom and Dad discussing something important with Bucket and Mulch.

"I know, he meant alot to you, Bucket," said Mom. "But I don't know where he is."

There were tears streaking down the bucket headed man's eyes. Mulch

patted him on the back. He sniffled, "I know, I miss him so. He was an old friend, you see!"

"I know, but it's been years since I seen him or anyone else from that expedition..." said Mom. "But, maybe, if I can start questing again I can look for him and the other members of my crew."

Bucket nodded. "I'd like that," he said and then Dad and Mulch consoled the crying man and took him away.

It wasn't until Mom and Dad approached me that I realized they were talking about a certain Whispering Death, the creature and cursed man who had been at the root of several of my problems growing up. I mean, if I hadn't stumbled onto him all those years ago, maybe things would have been a little better between Mom and myself.

Mom smiled at me as she approached. "So, shall we go?" she asked. Then again, it was hard to imagine anything being better than what I had. "The feast can't start without us."

I nodded my head, my mouth still able to water despite being so cold. I was especially looking forward to the food. Smoked eel, fried oysters, honey glazed bread. Now, I used to like raw fish like any normal dragon did, but ever since I discovered human tastes, I found I preferred some of the things I could never eat before. And given the fact that this was the biggest feast of the year, well, I couldn't be more excited.

"Oh, and I just remembered something about this morning!" said Mom, as she pulled me closer in a hug.

Hiccup and Dad both stared at each other, perplexed. I was too, since I didn't know about the occasion. "Uh, Mom?" Hiccup question.

"Val?" Dad asked.

"Happy birthday, sweetie. You're a year older now!" she declared.

I blinked, recalling an important fact I tended to forget. Oh, right, I was hatched a dragon after all. I didn't remember that far back since, well, that was the day I was born, but Mom did say to me I entered into this world the same way other dragons did; an egg submerged in the water that then fiery exploded, only to leave behind a small hatchling that instinctively swam up to the surface, weak but still able to survive on his own. That was how things were done for most Breeds and it all usually happened on the same day come to think about it. It was only by some weird cosmic coincidence that Snoggletog also occurred the day the dragons have to hatch their young. Also, coincidentally, it also meant Stormfly, Barf, Belch, Meatlug, and Hookfang also gain another year as well.

I broke from Mom, a smile plastered on my face. I couldn't wait to tell my friends, even though we all shared the same birthday. For dragons, the date of birth wasn't exactly an important occurrence. Everyone was born close to the same day, so, there was little special about it. It was only really important the first day a dragon came into the world and the year after, but never more than that. I guess I should be thankful none of us were dragons, right now, were we?

"Congratulations bud," Hiccup declared. "I have to wait two more years before I get to celebrating my fourth one."

"Yeah, that probably means I'm the older brother," I joked around. Hiccup had the misfortune of being born on a day that only comes in every four years, a leap day, so to speak.

"Well, hopefully that means I can live four times longer than everyone else!" declared Hiccup.

Dad clapped his hands. "Well, we can't exactly have another party for you son, but maybe you can put up with Snoggletog."

I grinned.

And then things suddenly became a little more chaotic. Out in the distance, I heard a small explosion. In the direction of the explosion, I saw a plume of black smoke.

"That would be the Blackhorn's place!" said Hiccup.

"Blackhorns?" questioned everyone else.

"Well, most people hit by Alvin's curse ended up panickingâ€¦ they on the other hand got marriedâ€¦" he said. "And then they well, you knowâ€¦" my brother stated, the answer not pleasing to either Dad or Mom. "They asked not to be changed back to take care of their soon to be kids and allâ€¦"

"So you didn't submerge tell them eggs in water?" I asked. I mean, that was the only way to suppress the ball of fire that erupted whenever a dragon first exits his or her shell.

"It's not like I know they explode!" Hiccup replied sheepishly.

My father sighed, obviously a little upset that his day of rest and celebration interrupted with a little work. "I'llâ€¦ be right back," declared Dad as he stepped towards the explosion.

Mom grabbed hold of my Dad's hand. "I think I should go tooâ€¦" she said.

"Thank you, Val," said Dad.

"You better go on ahead boys," said Mom.

And then the pair walked off.

I turned at Hiccup, glowering. Today was a near perfect day aside from getting my whole body frozen, now this small emergency shows up. "Why haven't I heard of this?" I questioned him.

Hiccup gave me a sheepish grin. "Hey, you kinda' disappeared when this all happened!" declared my brother. "And besides, it's been a whole month since I have haven't deliberately set something on fire! That's a personal record!" my brother declared.

I snorted and then began walking. Well, I suppose there were things I could still look forward to. Good foodâ€¦ and Stormfly's company. That'd definately help me take my mind off ofâ€¦ this incident.

* * *

><p>So, as it turns out, I am not a total success. I spent a few weeks thinking I was on top of the world and living the best years of my life and then suddenly a little mistake I made causes me to be brought down low.

I was strangelyâ€¦ fine with that.

I mean, sure, I would have wanted to begin this new phase of my life, as someone who didn't cause misfortune everywhere he went, but I found it strangelyâ€¦ comforting to know that I wasn't all that different from how I was several months before. I wasn't a total failure, sure, but I wasn't perfect either.

Thankfully, it's unlikely anyone would get hurt. The Matterhorns and their kids were all dragons and that meant they all had that they all had fireproof scales. While I was also sure that the neighbors would work to suppress the fire, the fact of the matter was that since we were all Vikings who were invaded by dragons _constantly_ pretty much meant that it was unlikely anyone would be getting hurt. Besides, the fire didn't seem that big or dangerous in the first place, at least, that's what I hoped the situation looked like.

If anything, I expect the Matterhorns will have a talk with their realtor over the importance of fire safety with children who can breathe fire and some property damage, but that's about it. No lives lost or ruined and plenty of people covered in soot for the Snoggetog feat, nothing.

I guess maybe it was the gods' way of reminding me to be a little humble before my head started crushing my legs. Well, maybe I needed it; I mean, ever since I came back home all those weeks ago, literally _everything_ has turned out better than I hoped for. My family was complete, I wasn't a failure, Astrid and I were enjoying our time as friends. Nothing went wrong until I conveniently forgot that a couple decided to goâ€¦ get married before I had the chance to dispel that magic. I decided that maybe that was something I needed to figure out some other time. Tonight was a night of feast and celebrationâ€¦ and the night I made an important decision.

I took a glance, at my brother. He still glowered at me, still upset, but that gradually faded with every step we took. I wondered if any of those kids the Blackhorns had would well, would they be dragons or humans? Sure, they were being hatched as dragons, but if we were to dispel the magic on them, would they still be covered in scales?

Toothless and I arrived at our destination not much later, but neither of us could enter the building.

Before us stood a massive stretch of people, Vikings and the remaining dragons, all lined up to enter through the massive doors of the Hall. Tonight, the Great Hall was going to be stretched to its limits, as it was always was every year. I gritted my teeth and tried to give my brother a comforting smile. I know he wanted to get inside more than I did. "Another line!" shivered Toothless, outraged.

"Sorry, bud," I said, trying to be cheerful. Toothless though was still upset. Before I realized what was happening, I felt my brother tug onto my shirt and drag me through the line. "Toothless!" I cried out.

"I'm not going to be held up by another line!" called out my brother.

"It's still rude!" I said, unable to just pull myself.

Men and women that my brother and I passed by gave us looks of dissatisfaction as we broke through the ranks.

"Hey, watch it!" shouted one man.

"Well, excuse me!" said one woman.

And that was just a few of the plaintiffs.

"Important sons of the Chief coming through!" declared my brother, racing through whoever soon it on way.

"Sorry! Pardon us!" I apologize since my brother wouldn't.

It wasn't long before my brother ran out of Vikings he had to upset. We eventually made our way through the massive lines and found our way to our usual table. "Come on!" urged Toothless.

"Hey, slow down!" I said.

Toothless though did like he usually did. He didn't slow down until we stopped right at the table. I skidded, my boots not providing enough grip to let me stop at an instant. I ended up falling chest first into my seat, my head lunging to underneath the table. Thankfully, there was an unspoken that this spot was reserved for me and my friends, otherwise, things might have turned out a little differently.

I groaned, hurt, but not enough to leave behind any lasting damage. I pulled myself upright in my seat, but not before checking to see if the little preparation I set aside for tonight was still here. "You're enjoying pulling me around everywhere," I said to my brother, frowning. Ever since I stopped being several dozen times being his size, my once-much-littler-than-me brother got into the habit of dragging me around everywhere.

Toothless, sitting across from me, gritted his teeth in a vicious grin. "I'm just paying you backâ€¦ with interest."

I shook my head and then turned my attention to a pair of familiar and welcome voices. "Get your yaknog!" she said, handing out full mugs of her new strange concoction. A couple of the more daring Vikings reached out and received a cup of the stuff, but I couldn't tell if they liked the stuff or not.

Stormfly was beside her, holding two large pitchers full of the new beverage in her hands. She was dressed in her special purple dress, the one my brother apparently got for her.

"Astrid!" I called out, wanting to change the tone of the

conversation. The Great Hall was as noisy as ever and it took emptying my lungs before I felt like I was actually saying something audible.

"Stormfly!" my brother did the same.

The two girls immediately took attention of us and quickly made their way over, giving out mugs and drink along the way. "Hiccup, Toothless!" Astrid shouted once she was close enough. Stormfly did the same.

"Hey, how's that job Mom gave you tonight?" I asked the two girls. It wasn't time yet for the actual feast. The food hasn't been sent out yet, but there were plenty of people able to serve refreshments. Mom actually pulled a few strings and managed to get Astrid and Stormfly in a position to serve tonight.

Astrid gave a grin. "Well, the yaknog is a little hit or miss."

Stormfly made a face. "Well, it certainly doesn't taste as good as yak venison."

Astrid returned a polite grin, unoffended at her friend's opinion. "I think it's doing better than if I stuck with using flour in mix! Maybe if I keep this up for a few years, we might actually get a new Snoggleto tradition!"

"Why use flour?" I questioned her.

Astrid shrugged. "Everyone like cake batter!"

Toothless licked his lips. "Got that right!" he declared.

"Anyways," Astrid said, approaching and handing my brother and I two mugs full of her experimental beverage. Toothless sniffed at the drink and backed an inch away from his seat. I wished I could do that too, but Astrid was looking at me. "Want some more yaknog?" she offered, waiting for us to receive her gift.

I did, but it wasn't like I had any choice. "Uh, thank you, Astrid," I said, regretting every word. I didn't think I showed it in my face, but I loathed to taste that drink again. A few days ago, Astrid gave us the first batch of her new recipe. Though she managed to have a little help from Mom with it, I still found myself wanting to vomit after just taking a sip of the stuff last time.

I took the mug away from her, but Astrid wasn't stepping away. She was waiting for me, an excited smile on her face. "So?" she wondered. And then I made my decision. Oh, the things I do for her affections.

Hopefully my own stomach would forgive me for this crime against my own body. I hoped the recipe was refined since last time. I drank the yaknog, taking it all in a single gulp, all the better to not have more of the stuff later. "Oh, that hit the spot!" I said aloud. In reality, it felt like some sort of high speed car wreck happened in my throat.

Astrid beamed, making me feel like that sacrifice was worth it.

hopefully.

Stormfly whistled. "That'sâ€¦ bold of you, foolish, yet bold," she commented

Then, as soon as she said that, Toothless, who had mostly just sat there, looking at the drink swallowed his in its entirety not a moment later. "Refreshing!" he said, but I can see that was trying his hardest to not vomit the whole thing up.

Stormfly cringed. "Well, I can't say you're a coward for drinking thatâ€¦" she said to my brother. He gave her a big grin.

Astrid elbowed her, laughing a little. "Hey!"

The two girls then walked off, more orders and requests for the utterly repulsive to me beverage were being send their way. "Come back for dinner!" I called out to them. There wasn't enough time to pull out the object I set aside for.

They both waved their hands and went off, their unsaid promise being clear to me.

I then turned to Toothless, whoâ€¦ expelled the contents of his stomach of his stomach into his mug. He groaned, but I still smirked. "Why are you looking at me like thatâ€¦?"

"Oh, nothing, just wondering how you and Stormfly were getting along," I asked.

"Well, it's fine," said my brother, his tone indecisive. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, not much," I lied. Really, I wonder why my brother pulled off that stunt the moment Stormfly, claimed what I did was admirable. Infact, does my brother even know why either.

I shook my head, turning my attention to another pair of my friends coming this way. Fishlegs and Meatlug, holding each other's hands and bringing up contented smiles came along the way.

"Meatlug, Fishlegs!" I called out.

Both of them approached us, flashing us their teeth. "Toothless, Hiccup!" they called out in turn.

The two larger teenager then took seats by my brother and me, Fishlegs by me and Meatlug by Toothless.

"How have you guys been doing?" I asked them.

The two larger teens turned to face each other, as if silently trying to communicate something important. I actually had a hunch on what it might be. "Oh, well, after Alvin held us prisoner againâ€¦" Fishlegs began.

"...And a talk with Stormflyâ€¦" continued Meatlug.

The two of them looked at each other, as if unsure of what to really say. But thankfully for them, I didn't need for them to finish. I

smirked at the two of them, congratulating my friends. "That's great guys!" I said, elbowing my oldest friend in his sides.

Fishlegs blushed, my guess was spot on.

Meatlug also blushed as well. "Just, don't tell Fishleg's parentsâ€¦ or even anyone else yet!" said the girl.

I nodded, but I couldn't help but feel to point out a simple fact. "Right, because everyone doesn't know alreadyâ€¦" I said. Really, if anything, I'm surprised it took either of them this long to make a move.

"Know what?" my brother said. He was out of the loop and very clueless.

"Oh, uh, nothing important," said Fishlegs.

"Bard stuff!" said Meatlug.

Toothless just shrugged.

Fishlegs then looked at the table's underside, likely seeing it from the corner of his eye. "Hey what's-" He was about to reach at the object but I stopped him.

"Don't touch it!" I asked of him. He did so, though he scooted as far away from the item as he could. "Thank you," I said.

At this time, another set of familiar voices, this time several of them. Hookfang and Snotlout led the Barf, Belch, Tuffnut, and Ruffnut over to the table. All of them were in human form, since the first thing I did since I returned to being able to work in the forges was to make everyone new amulets, both as replacements and as a test to see if Toothless and I could repeat the same spell over and over.

"Hey guys!" I shouted to them. "Over here!"

Both sets of twins were in a discussion over who whether or not the proper use for a book was as a 'projectile' or 'melee' weapon, which I was strangely glad I didn't understand the context of. Either way, that meant the four of them were stuck, not listening to me.

Hookfang, though, heeded our call and went over to come sit beside me and my friends. Or at least he would have, if Snotlout didn't get in front of him to bar the way. "Hey, why should we?" he asked.

I blinked. "Uh, no reasonâ€¦" I said, absentmindedly, I didn't have any idea to know what to say.

"Well, then I think we'll go to our own seat!" said my cousin.

"You mean the ones right next to me?" I questioned him. I wish was I was being sarcastic, but I think it was kinda obvious that the tables couldn't support twelve Vikings.

My cousin huffed, ignoring me but still sat at the table right next to mine.

"What was that about?" Toothless questioned.

I shook my head. "I don't know bud, I don't know," I just was surprised since, in the past few months, I've gotten quite close to my cousin, enough that we actually acted like cousins, did things together. I mean, I had him come along to help me get Mom, that had to count for something. He hung around and I actually liked his company. Now though, I didn't know why he was suddenly giving me a cold shoulder.

Then, I heard a horn blare, the noise so loud that I was sure the Meatheads would have heard it. All the other noise in the Great Hall fell silent and all eyes turned towards the duo that stood in the center.

"So, now that we have your attention," Mom declared, a large emptied horn in her hands, "we can begin."

Dad stepped forward, just in front of the fire. He nodded at Mom, as if waiting for her approval. She nodded back and Dad then began, "Well, this year has certainly been one that no one on Berk is bound to forget," he shouted. There were several approving nods all over the place. "First my son ends up turning into a dragon, then soon other villagers left and right suffering a similar fate. "

Astrid and Stormfly, still carrying their yaknog equipment, rushed into the table, Astrid taking the side next to me that Fishlegs didn't occupy. "Are we late?" she whispered in my ear.

I smirked at her. "Not at all." Then, silently, I began unstrapping the item I bound under the table, ready to give it you its future owner.

I know Dad might be upset at me if I decided not to listen in on his speeches, but this was very important to me.

Father continued, "Our own enemy cursed dozens of men, trapped them into forms not of their ownâ€|"

I then tapped Astrid on the shoulders, grabbing her attention for just a moment. She looked at me and then, I silently directed her at her new possession. "Wait, is this-?" She grabbed onto the item, still underneath the table, by its handle.

I smirked. "You needed a new one," I whispered.

Dad still continued speaking to the audience. "Then, it turns out, I have another boy to call my own and I couldn't call myself widower anymore!"

She then ran her hand over axe's head, feeling the fine texture of the cold metal under her fingers. It was the best work I ever made and used the finest steel I could get my hands upon. I toiled for hours, secretly in the night making this weapon all for this moment. "Iâ€| don't know what to sayâ€|" she whispered back.

"How about an answer to this question?" I suggested. She took a glance at me, waiting. I sighed and my heart tensed. Giving her the axe was the easy part, the simple part that I knew I could pull off

perfectly. For something so seemingly simple, who knew it could have been so dangerous and fraught with peril. But, I managed to steel myself and say the words; "Would you be my girlfriend?" I whispered, only loud enough for her to hear.

Then, as if on cue, my Dad said, "Sounds like something a drunkard would come up with, don't it?" There were hearty laughs all over the room, men and women alike found my father's words very humorous and I hoped that wasn't an omen of how things were going to come out for me?

"I-I-" Astrid stuttered. I hoped she was going to say 'yes', but stuttering wasn't a good sign. I looked at her in the eyes, pleading wordlessly for an answer I could stand. And then, I think I got to her. She smiled. She didn't say a word but instead nodded her head up and down in approval. She then drew close to me and put her arm around me.

My heart soared and I suddenly found myself on top of the world. Perhaps in any other culture, gifting a close friend with a weapon on a Winter celebration all about giving gifts to start a romantic relationship might have been frowned upon, but since we were Vikings, it was pretty much tradition for us. Plus, it was the only thing I knew that would really get Astrid's attention.

Just in time, I heard my Dad continue. "But now everything is how it should be. Vikings can now go how as Vikings if they wanted to, I have my family with me, better than how it used to be!"

"And none of this, would have been possible if it weren't for our sons!" declared Mom.

"That's us!" shouted Toothless, his hand reaching across the table to grab on to mine. He stood up and pulled me up along with him.

This time, I didn't even try to hold back and instead willingly joined him.

As soon as we did, Mom and Dad both declared, their words perfectly in sync with one another's, "We present to you, Hiccup and Toothless Horrendous Haddock, the Hopes and Heirs to the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans!"

A loud uproar of cheer and praise burst everywhere in the room. Claps and applause hammered us at every angle, deafening us with approval. Stormfly and Astrid, though they sat nearby us. For once in my life to be proud to bear my name and official title. Toothless, though he was the younger sibling rightfully deserved it as well; I couldn't have made it this far without him.

The cheering all lasted for maybe a few minutes before slowly dying down. Once that happened Toothless and I both sat down.

Astrid gave me a kiss on the cheek, wordlessly confirming her approval a dozen times over with a single action. "You earned it," she said.

Stormfly chimed in and said to Toothless, "As did you."

I think my brother and I blushed, red as overripe tomatoes.

Yet, despite all that, I think I was right in saying, this Snoggletog was the best I ever had.

* * *

><p>If we take into consideration the way how most dragon eggs hatch, Toothless was likely born alongside other dragons and thus shares a birthday with | nearly everyone he knows.

****Starting the next arc is an important chapter. Due to the nature of it, I will not reveal much about the context except for who gets to narrate. I haven't decided who is narrating because both choices have very strong reasons for being selected, but it is a choice between Val and Stoick. So, I'll leave this up to a vote to decide. Whoever wins will be the narrator of all of the next chapter. Unlike this last time the other choice will not be put up as a point of view immediately afterwards, since it'd be redundant.****

****Ivangev1992: I'm sorry, but I didn't get that email address either. ALL email addresses are prohibited from being sent on , so I cannot contact you via the emails you keep sending me. Also, there's already a PM system built into the website, as well as an automatic notification system. Assuming you have the email you signed up to this website, you'd still be receiving notifications that way. Just go click your name at the top right of the screen while on this website and you'll be able to access it.****

27. Chapter 27

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Well, that vote ended in a tie. But as Val was in the lead before the tie, I have went for her. However, I think I have found a way to sort out the tie situation since I last posted.****

****Also, I started another fanfic. It might be of interest to you to see what kind of mess I could start with Drago Bludvist and transformation magic.****

****Hope you enjoy. See you.****

* * *

><p>I stirred from my nightmare, a horrid dream where everything that I was became twisted and corrupted. I was alone, abandoned and left to fend for myself against a world that I had no understanding of how to endure; my son hated me no matter how much I sacrificed to ensure his future; all the while, I knew that at the very end of my days, I would be punished when my only crime was that I wanted to survive my torment. But that couldn't it have been real, could it? Surely, the world, the gods, the norms couldn't have been that cruel.<p>

My eyes fluttered open and the first thing I saw was his smile. No, the world wasn't cruel, not when I living proof of that right in front of me. "Hello, beautiful," he said, his tone so soothing and warm for a man so rough around the edges.

"Hello, handsome." I returned a smile of my own and gave the man I fell in love kiss. For a moment, I thought this was just a dream, but the touch of his skin against mine told me otherwise. Dreams weren't that warm, illusions did not feel and writhe like this.

I don't know how long the kiss lasted, but neither me nor my husband cared if we hung on til sunset. But unfortunately, such things were never meant to last. I heard the sound of something wooden hit the floor and my husband immediately broke from me and turned to his back. "Toothless" he said, his tone stern and controlled.

My youngest son stood right at the doorway, his face tinged with red. "Uh, sorry!" he spoke as he picked up a wooden box that had fallen onto the floor. "I just- uh- didn't expect-." he stuttered, awkwardly.

I couldn't help but keep grinning at him. "Didn't what?" I question, even though I was pretty sure I knew the answer. Good thing he came before we did anything he shouldn't be looking at.

My son stayed silent but lit up like a burning bonfire.

My eldest son then poked his head from out of the doorway, his face looking like he expected this. "I told you you shouldn't have gone in," Hiccup said to his brother.

Toothless broke out of his trance, just enough to glower at his brother. "It was your idea!"

"Hey, not everything I think up is worth doing!" replied my eldest.

About the only thing my husband could do in this situation was slap himself in the face. "Oh, boys," he said, as if he had already been defeated. "It was bad enough when there was just one of you, now I have to put up with both of you!"

"And yet we still love them anyways," I said, grabbing a hold of my husband from behind.

He rolled his eyes, but then smiled at me and I knew that all was right in the world, everything was perfect. "Well, you better tell us why you're here! Can't you see we're in the middle of something?" demanded my husband, though his tone was far from anything resembling anger.

Toothless, practically turned bright red again, but Hiccup pushed him forward to keep him on track, yet even my eldest looked a little nervous.

"Just" this," my poor sweetie just barely could overcome his own embarrassment to present me the wood box. I let go of my husband and rolled a little away from him to receive the item and my son then darted off and away.

"What is it?" questioned my husband as I opened the box's lid.

Then I when it was opened, I saw the contents, over a dozen sheets of parchment all listed with text. I quickly shut the box, knowing full

well what it was.

I glanced over at my two sons, the color drained from their faces. They did their job admirably and now I wished I hadn't gotten them involved in this business; it wasn't meant for them.

"Uhâ€| Val," I heard my husband say to me. There was his concern in his voice.

I shook my head, not wanting his sympathy, not for this. "It's nothing important," I said. "Just go on and get breakfast readyâ€|"

"Are you sureâ€|?" my husband asked hesitatingly.

If there was ever a time I wanted my husband to become unfeeling, uncaring as stone, it was now. "I'm fine," I lied so perfectly, I almost believed it myself. "Go on, I've got ladies things to do!" I pushed him off the bed, just to drive the point even further.

My husband rolled his eyes at me, obviously annoyed, but I didn't let that get to me. "Ladies things," he said almost disdainfully.

"Ladies things," I said again. Though to be honest, I don't think I ever actually did any sort of morning hygieneâ€| in a long time.

My sons both shrugged and led my husband out of the room, leaving me alone with a box that was best left shut.

But I was no coward. I opened the lid once more and began reading the lines.

_Grislewx Stonefist. Died on collapsing Siege tower. _

Yellowbelly Bootstrap. Lost arm and leg due to collapsing Siege tower.

Basketcase Watershed. Died as a result of collapsing Siege tower.

With each line, I read, I felt a little bit of my die with every rune, yet I still read on, knowing that only further suffering awaited me. That was fine with me; I deserved that much for the things I have done.

Bottlebreaker Jellybeans. Death by immolation. Night Fury.

After all, it was my by will that everyone on these list had either died or ended up maimed. As much as I wish it was a dream, there was no denying what I had done. In order for me to do what was necessary for me to live, I had to commit great and terrible deeds for the sake of my own survival.

I read further, noting how every man or woman suffered their ends; it was only the most minor of penances I would need to do. Perhaps if I ever got into the place I was named for, I could apologize more directly. I didn't know the specifics of how each of them fell beyond some lines of text, but I was very sure that those I was reading about there the ones that died as a direct result of my actions. Only

Odin knew just how much suffering I caused _indirectly. _How many sons were left fatherless as a result of me leading and coordinating each wing of my Flight?

I shook my head and put the box down. I could no longer stand it; there were too many names, too many scars! I know that I was just reading off names and casualty reports off of sheets of parchment, but the sheer magnitude of it all just made it so unbearable. Did I really... do all of this? Did I really go this far?

I threw the box away, scattering the sheets of paper on the floor. I was so angry at myself for ever having let it come this far. And this was just the ones one Berk! Odin knows how much more blood was on my hands all over the Barbaric Archipelago.

I sighed and quickly cooled myself down. It wasn't going to do me any good to just stay angry over something that happened over the course of a decade. I picked up each sheet of parchment and gathered them right into the small box.

In retrospect, it wasn't so hard to see why my youngest was so convinced I was a monster; I was practically one already given how callously I committed these deeds. Perhaps this was why it took my eldest, my brightest joy nearly dying to convince me to change my ways. The woman I once was had been practically dead for years, replaced by a creature so bitter at the world around her.

Just as I was about to put the last piece parchment in the box, I read the names on it, just out curiosity and for the sake of perspective. What I saw surprised me.

Coattail. Missing.

Defty. Missing.

Donnar. Missing.

These were the names of my old crew, the men and women that I damned along with myself on that accursed expedition. I have no idea what happened to any of them in the interim, only that they were scattered across the seas, trapped in forms not of their own. I took a pen crossed several of those names out. I already knew of several who had died, but I was still unsure about the others. Was I the only one to survive all this time?

I shook my head. I'll worry about that when I don't have a sword looming over my head. Right now, I had to enjoy today, for my future looked bleak otherwise.

I then walked out of the bedroom and made my way to the dining area, the smell of freshly cooked meat wafting up my nostrils. While I might have been the woman of the house, my sons were more than adequate chefs in their own right. Both of them sat patiently at the table, the stew having been prepared and poured out over into bowls.

My youngest son then turned to me, his expression solemn and questioning.

"I'm fine, sweetie," I replied. Hopefully, that was going to be the

case.

My son's expression became calmer and he turned back to his soup.

My husband then approached me, just as concerned. "Are you sure? You've been in there for an awfully long whileâ€¦"

"It's nothing," I lied. In all of the time I spent living in this household, I had never once spoken about where I had been beyond some vague references. The moment, I did, well, I knew my husband was going to immediately ask for a divorce. There was no chance he was ever going to tolerate being married to someâ€¦ beast. I knew sooner or later, I would have to tell him the truth, but I just couldn't help letting to deception, the facade to last a little bit longer.

My husband nodded and then looked back at the table.

I took my seat and looked at the contents of my bowl, yak chunks and cabbage soup, not a typical Viking breakfast, but we were out of oatmeal. Yet as appetizing as it was, I could only stare at my entree.

Stoick and Toothless were in much the same situation as I was, only able to poke chunks of meat with a spoon. I shouldn't have opened that box, it ruined an otherwise perfect day.

"So, Dad what are we going to do about Thawfest?" Hiccup asked, breaking the ice.

He was the only one at the table who wasn't put into a foul mood and whatever warm feeling that surged through him was practically contagious. Everyone at the table suddenly shone sudden interest in a bright and interesting topic.

My husband slapped himself in the face. "Oh, you're right, son. Thawfest is next week!" declared my husband, his mood before turning to my our two boys. It took me a short moment to really understand what he said, but come to think of it, the Winter seemed to roll by fairly quickly. I suppose days full of bliss and warm feelings did that.

"Thawfest?" questioned Toothless. "You mean the games celebrating the end of Winter?" He didn't seem just as dour, but he was positively confused.

Fond memories of a much simpler time surged to the forefront of my mind. When I was a girl, I competed in every year. I didn't win any of the events, no matter how talented I was, since a certain flirt kept beating me, but it was a fun time. An idea then burned into my head and a positively beaming grin popped onto my face. "Oh, you should compete, son! It'll be fun!"

Toothless backed away, his face turning red. "Uh, shouldn't Hiccup go? He is the oldest."

Hiccup laughed. "Good one! Now if only being dead last meant I didn't have to participate!"

Toothless glowered at his brother. "I'm not exactly the greatest

atâ€| sports."

"Good, that's way better than 'total failure'!" replied Hiccup, giving a sardonic smile.

Stoick then ruffled Toothless's hair, a laugh erupting through his throat. "There's the axe throwing contest! You'll definitely beat Snotlout in that!" he said with a cheer, almost like he was calling a prediction of that event.

Toothless's frown turned into an inquisitive expression. "Wellâ€| I don't miss," he said.

"Of course you don't," I confirmed. "It's the one thing I know I taught you." I'll admit that I am a little guilty over letting my son starve for the night if he didn't score perfectly hit his targets, but the look on my son's face said he felt otherwise.

Toothless gave me a cocky smirk, suddenly feeling proud of himself. "You were a good teacher," he told me.

I returned with a smile of my own, feeling satisfied. Over the past few weeks, it's gotten even easier to relate to my once estranged son. I didn't have to him to become the best if he wanted to survive anymore, nor did I have to put up with a job that practically demanded me to kill a little of myself each time. Now that we were home, we could live our lives in peace. It was enough that we could even look back at all of the bad times and laugh a little. We were free of our burden. Maybe there was hope for me yet...

We all discussed the prospect further. Stoick suggested that the boys did their best to at least score in one of the events this year. Toothless, quite sure of himself, was already planning out the celebrations of his victory feast. Hiccup, often joked about he was a shoo in for last place, though I was very sure he would be better than that.

Every minute of that talk was perfect, a memory that I'd cherish for years to come. In my youth, I spent so much of my time exploring, wandering away from home, never once thinking about the possibility I would never return. Danger and adventure went hand in hand; I didn't worry, I didn't complain. It was just how I was.

Now, I knew better. I wanted to spend as much time talking, socializing with the ones I loved. It was why I made a desperate deal to serve for over a decade to a being that could easily be mistaking for the World Serpent's spawn. I knew otherwise.

But all good things must come to an end.

Hiccup and Toothless were the first to finish their meal. They were both apprentices with a job to do.

"We'll see you, Dad!" declared Hiccup.

Toothless spoke up, "Yeah, Gobber wants us working on some new armor!"

"Just don't burn something down!" laughed my husband.

"Oh, don't worry, I'll try not to set the neighborhood on fire! Again!" Hiccup laughed and then stepped out the door, taking his brother along with him.

I smiled as the two went. Strangely though, my eldest didn't have any incidents in the past few weeks, at least, not major ones that resulted injury.

Now that left me with a husband with an important topic to discuss. I smiled at Stoick, though my insides felt like they were bound to explode at any moment.

My husband, the lovable oaf that he was, spent the last few moments licking his spoon to get the last drops of soup.

I didn't want to do this, but I had no choice. He was going to find out, one way or another. And when did, I wanted the boys to be far away from that madness; they were too young to get involved. "Stoick, there's, we need to talk." The words left my mouth only because I forced them out.

"Hmph, about what?" my husband mused, his attention divided between me and a good bone.

Maybe if I was lucky, he wouldn't be paying enough attention to draw his axe and I could try again later, maybe some other time, like, sixty years from now.

"It's aboutâ€¦" I began, the words felt heavy and I couldn't keep up saying it. I had to struggle even think about what I wanted to say, but eventually I mustered up the courage to speak again.

Only to be cut off by someone else, a certain someone who was not even here. **"It is time, Flight Commander,"** my King's voice boomed in my mind. That was impossible though. My Lord was bound to his island, unable to interact with anyone outside of it. He never once had the power to speak to anyone off of his island, not before at any rate. For a moment, I thought it was only my imagination, but the voice called out to me yet again. **"Flight Commander, it is time to return to my service. The Winter has ended and now you must resume your post. Leave this one and return to me."**

Stoick though I was sure didn't hear the voice call out to me, looked noticeable concerned when I turned my head to one of the walls. "Val?"

I shook head disapprovingly at a being that wasn't even there. I had forgotten all about my oath to my Sire, to serve him as the seasons dictate as was tradition. I had thought that now that I had returned home I wouldn't need to serve him any longer, but apparently I was wrong.

"Worry not, my Flight Commander," the voice said to me again. **"A certain tribe of Herd once spoke of a beautiful maiden only allowed to spend the Winter with his husband. Should you return to me before your allotted time has expired, I will allow you spend every Winter with him."**

I froze and turned back to Stoick. My husband looked at me, concern in his eyes. "Are youâ€¦ okay?" he asked.

"**Do not speak of my to **_**him**_**, " **my King's voice spoke to me. I still could feel the venom that he had for my husband. I hated his very obvious disregard to my husband, but I tried to suppress it. He knew what I felt. **"Do not burden this creature of the knowledge of your duties, not if you wish to enjoy yourâ€| **_**mate's**_** company every Winter. He will despise you and destroy you once he knows the truth, that is simply what is.." **

"I'm fine," I spat, my anger flaring to heights I had never felt before. I felt like tearing down a building or shattering a tower with my bare limbs. I fought and killed to return back to my husband and just when I had been getting used to and settling in my new life, I find myself taken away, yet again. And the worst part wasâ€| I no longer had any say in the matter. I was a warrior sworn to an oath in exchange for a great power and if I did not kneel at my Lord's command, the consequences would be dire.

And he was right, I couldn't let Stoick know, not if it meant ruining any chance either of us would have to enjoy each other's company.

"Stoick, Iâ€| I have to go now," I said, trying to sound cheery. "Adventure, calls." I wanted to pass this off as one of my little stunts, the kind I used to do back when I young. I then ran out the door, not wanting to head back and face him. I couldn't not like this.

"Val! Wait!" Stoick called out to me, but I was too quick for him. I was gone before he knew what happened. He was used to me spending months away from home, this should be no different. Yet, it wasn't.

I sprinted down the dirt streets. Vikings left and right applauded me a returned hero as I walked by them, yet I knew I was nothing more than the beast that real heroes slay. Would I ever be forced to turn on my own Tribe? To hurt Stoick?

"**Worry not, Flight Commander," **said my Lord's voice. He was not here, but I could still feel the power he had. **"I will never require you to harm your own mate. **It was a small mercy, but it was there.

I dashed through the village and eventually made my way to the docks, my Lord's voice telling me where to go. I didn't fully understand the exact mechanics or effects of the pact I swore it, but I found myself being directed towards a certain destination. My Lord wanted me at the harbor, likely to give me my leave.

I approached one of the piers and slowly made my way down. Now that coldest part of Winter was over, the ice was weakening. Hiccup used whatever dragons we had left to tear off chunks of sheet ice long far earlier than Spring allowed, leaving nothing behind except for small ice floes.

"**Such an ingenious male," **the King's voice said. **"He and his brother would have made a fine Flight Commanders."**

"Leave them out of this," I said the air, not caring if any dockworkers nearby thought I went mad. I was already there; I was

angry at my Lord, for the first time since ever really. He had always seemed so respectful, trustworthy, and dependable before. This was the first thing I encountered in his service that upset me more than the blood I spilled.

"**I only speak the truth. True true and unrealized potential,"
said my King. **"Never have I met such gifted Kin before."

"I said leave them out of this!"

"**Very well," **my Lord said. **"Your ride is approaching, look at see him for yourself." **

I squinted my eyes and saw a ship out in the distance. There were no distinguishing features that I could make out at this distance, but I think I knew who was at the helm. I told my husband I was leaving off for an adventure, maybe my Lord knew that and planned for a somewhat convincing means of departure.

Yet before the ship could approach close, hurried footsteps approached me from behind. I turned and found Stoick, running toward me. He abruptly stopped and began panting right at me. "Val!" he managed to say with some difficulty. "Please stay!" he then approached me and tried to grab me, but I easily sidestepped the stumbling man.

As much as I didn't want to, I shook my head. "I'm sorry Stoick, but I can't!" I yelled, sounding more desperate than I could.

"Why not?" he choked out.

"**Do not tell him," **the King reminded me, again.

"I- I can't say..." Not if I wanted to remain married. Maybe I should get a divorce, just so that Stoick could find someone else, someone better than I was. It was a terrible ultimatum, speak the truth and suffer the wrath of both my husband and my Lord, or lie and continue living apart from my loved ones.

Stoick slumped his head down and sat it with his legs dangling off the side of the pier. "It's always secrets with you three," my husband muttered gloomily.

"I'm sorry." I joined him sitting there, wanting to spend my last few moments as a free woman by his side. My hand reached out to his and he accepted.

My husband sighed as if he was expecting that. "I know you are," he said. He then did a quick search around, checking to see if there was anyone watching the two of us and then he told me. "Does this have anything to do with all of the times you tried to kill me?"

I blinked, surprised and unable to react beyond stuttering.
"What?"

Stoick shook his head and removed his helmet and then peered at his own reflection in the metal. "Do I really look like that much of an idiot?"

"No!" I quipped. The conversation, suddenly left me feeling dumb

founded. What brought _this _up?

"I actually did some counting!" he said, his teeth showing as if he was recounting some daring exploit. "You nearly managed to nearly kill me thirty seven times!"

I went stiff, suddenly understanding with cold hard truth. He knew!

"Val," he called out to me, trying to grab hold of me. I reeled back, letting go of his hand, only for my husband got lucky and grasp my arm.

His mere gaze upon me terrified me more than any fell beast or dire creature. Nothing short of seeing my King's sheer enormity for the first time drove me this mad with panic. I would have probably done something to repel my husband force him, but I was too stunned to think on a solution clearly. How did I use my gift again? He hated me and I was going to have my head chopped off and mounted to a wall to set an example, a literal trophy wife!

I struggled to get free, my husband grip was too strong. I needed to force my way out, maybe even call the power that th- "Val, I don't want to lose you again." As soon as he said those words, every thought of rebellion in me was suddenly quashed. Realization struck and I saw he wasn't mad at me, not upset. Tears streaked my husbands eyes, the kind that strong men liked to deny they could ever do.

"Stoick, I-" I didn't know what to say. How did he know? Why wasn't he reaching for his sword?

"**Calm yourself, my Flight Commander, it is not advised to show weakness in front of a threat," **I heard my Lord's voice echoing through me. It was enough to break the tension in my muscles and focus on the bigger picture.

Stoick let go of me and I didn't run away. "Val," My husband tried to sound calm commanding, controlling, yet no matter how hard he tried, he still sniffled tears "I know you've been the Night Fury that's been ransacking the village for years..."

"Iâ€| was," I admitted and yet he still looked at me as if I hadn't turned into some horrible monster. A wave of sudden relief washed upon me. He wasn't angry, upset, or out to end me. It was like a heavy burden was finally off my shoulders.

I was about to ask how he was able to figure this all out, but he was already on it by the time the thought crossed my mind. "It wasn't easy, you know, figuring out the big secret all by myself, but I think it kind of became obvious when considering both our sons turned out to be Night Furies." he said, proud to have done it. "Plus, there was all the secrecy involved. Hiccup coming home as well, Hiccup, along side you really made the whole thing easier to puzzle out."

"**How clever,**" my King's voice resounded in my mind.

I could only stare at my husband, dumbfounded. Who would have ever guessed that he had it in him to solve a puzzle like that? Maybe

that's where Hiccup and Toothless get their smarts from. Odin knows that's I'm not that clever. "I thought you'dâ€¦"

"Hate you? Maybe I would have, a long, long time ago, but I know you did what you had to doâ€¦ to survive." my husband smirked. "I've missed you too much to hate you."

"I can't Stoick," I cried. "I have no choice but to go." I didn't care of the King punished me for speaking about that, but what else could I really do? He already figured out the big secret, he was probably already coming up with his own ideas about what happened and I doubted Hiccup or Toothless would flatout tell him the truth.

We both held on to each other, one last time. The hug lasted for about as long as it took for the ship sailed into port.

Stoick and I both glowered at the new comers, a ship full of seemingly ordinary sailors men hoisting sails. None of them were born human though, that much I knew.

Ruseclaw, or as he was known by among Vikings, Trader Al, looked at the two of us with disgust. Which was fair, I didn't much like the sight of him right now either. "I would have hoped that this would have occurred with less short notice," the fake merchant said to me. "It would have been wiser to avoid unnecessary complications."

"Give me one good reason not to sink your ship!" shouted Stoick, just about ready to draw his sword and take on the whole vessel himself.

It was only because I held my hands to his that he never drew his weapon. "They have to take me," I said. The boarding ramp dropped and I was about to walk over to it, but my husband's hold on me didn't let me.

"You're not going!" Stoick shouted. "I'm not losing you again!"

"Stoick, it'll be fine. I'll be back every Winter, I swear!"

He shook his head, stubbornly refusing like he always had. I wished I was so sure and "I don't care if Odin himself is the one mandating you to go to his hall! I'm not letting you go!"

Ruseclaw shook his head in disdain. "You are a fool. She must board."

"Please, Stoick," I begged, still trying to force myself from my husband's grip. "Don't get involved in this further. You'll be fine without me."

"And what about Hiccup and Toothless? They need their mother," my husband's words struck me like a dagger plunging through my heart. I didn't want to abandon them, especially not my youngest son, not like I had before.

"I have to!" I shouted. With a sudden surge of strength and resolve, I stomped on my husband's feet, causing a jolt of pain to loosen his grip. Then, I swatted him away, sending him stumbling backward while I boarded. "Go!" I barked.

The sailors hoisted the sails and then send the ship stuttering out of the docks. Yet my husband is not an easily deterred man. He leapt off the pier and landed at the side of the ships hull, the strength of his arms the only thing holding to the ship. "I'm not leaving you!" I shouted, trying to pull himself onboard.

Ruseclaw sneered with contempt. "Get off my ship!" He drew a dagger from his belt and was swung it right at my husband's hand.

"No!" I screamed and jumped at the man before he finished his strike. The knife embedded itself straight into wood, missing my husband's meaty hands just barely.

Ruseclaw tumbled onto the floor, blood dripping from his nose. I think I might have also punched him in the face when I sent im away. He wiped the blood that erupted from his nostril, his anger flaring. "You dare harm your own ally!?" he barked.

I glared at man. "You're not harming my husband! I'm going with you, but that doesn't mean you get to hurt him."

Ruseclaw's men could only stare at the scene, not sure what to do in this situation. I was a Flight Commander and though these Knights were not mine, I was still one of the King's lieutenants. One of the more brutish men went over to their leader and helped Ruseclaw stand to his feet. "Always so recklessâ€|" he muttered.

I grabbed onto Stoick's arms and pulled him aboard. As soon as this mess with Ruseclaw was cleared, I was going to petition him to turn this ship around and drop him- "I'm going with you." I stare at him. Words came out of my husband's mouth, yet I wasn't too sure if I was _listening _to them.

Ruseclaw and I both exchanged looks of confusion. Neither of us expected him to say that.

"Preposterous!" Ruseclaw snapped. "I will not-"

"Stoick, no, this isn't-"

"**Wait, my Flight Commanders,**" I heard my Lord's voice speak to me. No, not just me. Ruseclaw was addressed as well. I felt him through my connection to our Lord. "**Let him speak. I desire to hear his plea.**"

"I'm going," Stoick said again. "If I can't stop you from leaving me, I'll come with you."

"Stoick, I know you love me but please, don't go!" I begged of him. I was nearing the point I was going to crawl on my knees to stop him, but then he held my hands.

"Val, I don't know what this business is all about, but I was never there for you for fourteen years. I want to be there for you now," his words should have been more comforting, yet I can only feel my turmoil growing. I didn't want him to get involved, yet at the same time, I felt soâ€| vulnerable, weak.

"**Do not submit yourself to despair, Dead Wings," **my King's voice

reassured me. **"It is clear this Herd male is far too recalcitrant to parley or reason with. So, we shall grant him this desire. Let him come."** ******

"Iâ€¦ dislike this course of action," sneered Ruseclaw. "But, I suppose I shall take you to see my Lord." I could practically _feel _Ruseclaw's hesitation conflicting with his loyalty to our King. He didn't like the idea any more than I did.

Stoick glared at the man. "Good," said my husband.

"Also, as another stipulation, I advise it would be best to bring the youths to witness the occasion. Your sons, Dead Wings, as well as the One Eye's former Squires, plus a certain Nadder, there is much I would wish to speak to them." ******Fear surged within me. It was bad enough that my husband was coming along with me to thisâ€¦ farce. Now I had to bring in my sons and their friends? ******"Worry not, my Flight Commander, I swear that none of the younglings will be harmed while under my protection." ******That promise might have been only a promise, but I believed the King enough that those words eased my discomfort; I knew he was true to his word.

While Ruseclaw had nothing but distaste for Stoick, his feelings on the children were far moreâ€¦ chaotic. I didn't feel any hatred or ill will towards them, but at the same time, he did not like the idea of allowing them to return. "If you will allow us, there are some things we need to take care of before we leave; there are others we need to take," he told my husband.

Stoick turned to me, his expression hard. "Others?"

"The boys," I said, my tone weary. While I knew he at least didn't mind most of the others, I knew our sons would overshadow all the rest.

Stoick gave Ruseclaw a hard look. "Will you stay in port for two hours?"

Ruseclaw clearly hated the idea, big surprise, but he nodded. "If at the same time, you stop yourâ€¦ thugs from harassing my crew."

"Then we have a deal," Stoick said.

"Acceptable," ******I heard the King speak.

The two glared at each other for only a moment and then broke off to differences of the ship. Ruseclaw then gave orders for the crew to return to port to collect the rest of the passengers for this accursed voyage.

I approached my husband, more worried about this than anything else I had ever done in my whole life. "Stoickâ€¦"

"I know not all dragons are bad, but Odin, is that that man justâ€¦ terrible." he muttered, taking off his helmet and wiping the sweat from his brow.

"He is a Terror, you know," I said dryly. Stoick pursed his lips at , more urgently, I said, "I'mâ€¦ not sure this is a good idea."

"It isn't, but it's only way," Stoick admitted. He then put his helmet back on and unsheathed his sword slightly, just enough to check the blade. "But if I have any say in this, I think I'd rather have you stay home."

My heart shuddered once I realized what he was planning. He wasn't planning to come to the King in peace.

And the worst part of this all, I knew there was nothing I could say to deter my husband or change the outcome.

* * *

><p>Next chapter: Stoick meets the King.

28. Chapter 28

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****This chapter took longer to write than anticipated, but boy is it huge. Let me just say, I am quite pleased with myself for finishing this on time. It's full of stuff that many of you will see coming, as well as hints to some stuff I have kept hidden from you.****

****Read, enjoy, and review.****

* * *

><p>"Is Mom going to be alright?" My son looked at me, his eyes wide and fearful for what was to come. Those words hurt me, more so than any weapon wielded by a man. Here I was, the great big Chief, a man whose title made me sound like I was some sort of giant among men. I was being laid low by the words of a boy who was maybe eighty-five pounds.<p>

"It's alright, son. I'll make sure everything is alright," I told him, my tone controlled and very level. I held him close to me, yet I was unsure if I did that because he needed to be comforted more. I felt so weak, so vulnerable for the first time in a long time, but I did my best not to show it. Whatever happens in the next few hours, I needed to be unflinching, unrelenting if I wanted to make this through this in one piece.

My son looked like he was about to break down right in my arms right then and there, the only thing keeping him together being whatever pride he had with him. "It's just- I just wish Mom-

"Don't say another word," I said firmly. "Mom's not leaving us, I'll make sure of it."

"Alright, Dad." My son sniffled and held back whatever emotions were welling up inside of him. He let go of me and tried to make himself look tougher, more bold. He wiped the sweat away from his brow, he was definitely not crying a little. There had to be sliced onions here, I was sure.

"Be brave, Toothless." I put my hand on his shoulder and reassured him. He was a big warrior, a tough young man, not a scrawny boy.

"I wish I was strongerâ€|" Toothless muttered, looking down at the ground gloomily.

"Strength isn't everything." Maybe it sounded like hypocrisy coming from my mouth, considering how much I used to wish my other son was a wee bit buffer, but after everything that happened, I think I have changed my tune. "What good is all the strength in the world, if you have none of the will to use it? Strength will come to you, but bravery is something you have to arm yourself with."

Toothless nodded, understanding. His shaking stopped, his heart strengthened. Yes, he's what a Viking should look like. I grinned, feeling that maybe there was a little hope left in this world.

"Now get your brother, there'sâ€| things we want to talk about," I told him.

Toothless nodded and then went to the other side of the hold, past boxes and crates full of junk until he disappeared. Trader Al, Ruseclaw, whoever he really was, might have been a spy, but I can't say he wasn't also a merchant. His ship was packed full of stuff, enough to make an otherwise plain cargo hold have rooms.

I sighed, relieved that he was gone.. Now, with my son convinced, all I had to do was convince myself. Unlike my son, I didn't have a father to hold onto and tell me everything was going to be fine, not that mine would have done such a thing. No, he would have hammered to me the harsh reality that was just ahead of me.

After the past few months, after every little bit of life getting more and more chaotic and unstable, after every single revelation that had come rearing its ugly head, my standards have changed. Not too long ago, I have decided, I was fine with Hiccup beingâ€| well, Hiccup; he didn't have to be strong or buff, or even human for me to still consider him my son. Toothless, he was practically hatched from an egg and that doesn't stop him from being my son. As for Val, what more need to be said? I wanted my wife back, even if it meant accepting the things she did in the interm. I didn't care if any of them were Vikings or Night Furies, I just wanted my family, was that so much to ask? My life had reached a high point and from here, there was only one way to go, down.

This was a foolish suicide mission and I knew it. If I had the choice, I would have kept every one of my sons back home under Gobber's protection. It was better that they didn't come and witness me make possibly dying on this mad quest. They would have been better off growing up the rest of their lives without me. No, unfortunately this was all or nothing. I either keep everything or nothing. Good thing I am not resorting to a coin flip.

I slowly unsheathed my blade and checked the edge. It was made of pure steel single bladed, cruciform sword. I tossed it up in the air and quickly stood, catching the sword by its grip and then pretended to strike a foe that didn't exist. I inspected the weapon again, noting how well perfect the weight of the blade felt in my hands. Admitted, it was a bit on the plain side, featuring nothing special other the inscription on the blade, but that inscription meant plenty on its own. Ulfberht was the trademark for a line of master swordsmiths. After Alvin's last visit, I decided that I wanted to

have the absolute best weapon I could get my hands on. My son was good, don't get me wrong, but he still had quite a ways to go before he was _that _good.

I swung the blade again. It effortlessly cut through my imaginary enemies and I had little doubt it would do the same to a real foe. _Ulfberht _blades were sharp as can be, and many Chiefs all over like to brag about owning such a weapon. Well, hopefully that reputation kept me alive.

At this point, the sound of approaching foot steps interrupted me. "Hey! Let go!" I heard Hiccup cry out.

For a moment, I thought that the Trader Al's goons were coming down to let us disembark, but then I saw the giddy looks of four teenagers.

Barf, Belch, Ruffnut, and Tuffnut all flashed me smiles as they dragged my son into my corner of the ship. My son might have been a little on the scrawny side, but he was putting up quite the fight, nearly managing to escape and break himself from the other teenager's hold. But eventually, they got him at my feet and threw him inside.

"There, we got him!" cheered Tuffnut.

"Ooh, do we get a prize?" asked Ruffnut.

"You get a very angry Hiccup," Hiccup told them, brushing off the dirt and dust that stuck onto his coat.

Ruffnut and Tuffnut looked at each other and seem to have come to an agreement.

"Um, yeah," said Ruffnut.

"We don't like that prize," said her brother.

Then, Toothless broke through the two boys who stood at the 'doorway', Barf and Belch. "Coming through!" he called out, shoving his way through the two boys.

"Hey, watch were-"

-You're going!" declared Barf and Belch.

"Sorry!" my son said, flashing the two a sheepish grin. The two pouted at my youngest son, but then dropped it entirely, instead giving him a confirming nod of their heads. Toothless then turned to me, flashing me a smile like he did the most important thing in his life.

In response, Hiccup rolled his eyes at his brother, apparently annoyed.

I asked, mostly because I didn't know why Hiccup was soâ€¦| hesitant to come to me. "So, what exactly happened that you needed to get dragged in, boy?"

"Oh that!" Ruffnut raised her voice excitedly.

"He and Astrid were- Hey Ow!" Tuffnut began, but got interrupted when someone crushed his feet.

"Thanks, Astrid," Hiccup commented, congratulating the newcomer that came in after Toothless.

"Oh, don't mention it! He had it coming," the blonde haired girl said, hints of fury in her voice. She then grabbed both Tuffnut and Ruffnut's heads and slammed them together. The twins then both shambled around, repeatedly crashing into each other in their daze. They spoke nothing but gibberish. "And this was for ruining that moment!"

I smirked at the scene. How could I have forgotten Hiccup's girlfriend? It was so endearing how Astrid stood up for my son, his boyfriend, at a time like this. Suddenly, that explained a little about why he was so hesitant to show up. I mean, if I had the option, I don't think I would leave Val's side at a time like this. Stupid, terrible! Terror! I shook my head. I had more important things to do than get angry at someone who wasn't here, even though he deserved it. I had no idea how long we had left and I needed to manage my time as best as I could.

"Alright, lads, we need to talk about somethings," I said. Both of my sons dropped what they were doing and faced me. Astrid did so as well. The twins were still too dazed to take notice and Barf and Belch seemed to be more focused on their two confused friends.

"About what, Dad?" asked Toothless, his tone a little braver than it was a few minutes ago, but still had a hint of doubt.

"About this King dragons serve," I said. They all looked at me, startled, probably because no one bothered mentioning the King to me. "Do, I really look that clueless?" I said, deadpan.

Toothless and Hiccup both cringed as if they were unsure about saying what was on their minds. "Do you want us to tell you?" Toothless asked.

"Or do you want us to _really _tell you?" added Hiccup.

I sighed. Two sons and they're both jokers. "Whatever, just tell me about him." I knew there was a King of dragon. No one, not the young dragons, not my sons, not Val said anything about him, but I knew. I knew because Trader Al, Ruseclaw, he was a dragon and always spoke about his King and how he was subservient to him obeyed his commands and words. While I knew he was lying about his humanity, I somehow knew that he was being honest about who he served.

Hiccup, Toothless, and Astrid all turned to look at each other, all of them flashing each other hesitant sheepish grins. I knew I hit something important if they were all hesitating on a response.

"Well, uh- Dad,"

"Well, you see-"

Both my sons tried to speak, but their tongues were tied. I didn't get why they were so hesitant though. This King among dragons, he was just another dragon, as far as I knew.

"The King isâ€¦ powerful," said another voice. Stormfly stepped into the room easily, now that Barf and Belch were in the way.

"So, is anyone else going to burst in?" Hiccup asked, turning to face out the entrance. "Because this place sure has plenty of room for us all!"

"We're good!" declared Fishlegs, standing just outside the door. He flashed us all a sheepish grin. Beside him was Meatlug and behind them were Hookfang and Snotlout. As part of the terms for my coming along, my sons and pretty much all of their friends and I were stuffed into the cramped cargo hold of Trader Al's ship. Val was topside, with the rest of the crew, leaving me alone to watch a bunch of kids.

I shook my head. It was time to get back on focus. "Powerful you say?"

Stormfly nodded.

"Tell me something I don't know," I said, swinging my sword another time. The King, this hypothetical ruler among dragons, obviously had to have some sort of power to have him be in charge of things. That meant he was either physically impressive, had great intelligence, very charismatic, or some combination of the three; he wouldn't be in charge if he didn't.

"Uh, Dad, that's like the understatement of the year," commented Hiccup. "If you're thinking about facing he'll-"

I swung my sword again, cutting through more imaginary hordes. Hopefully, all I needed to do was to talk to the him, to Val's boss, to get this mess sorted out. If not? Well, I didn't bring this sword for show alone. If there was a head, then that meant decapitation was an option. "I'll beat him," I replied to Hiccup, still practicing.

"But Dad, King is very powerful," Hiccup shouted. "He's-"

I approached Hiccup and patted him on the shoulder, stopping him from speaking with my body language alone. "Don't worry about me, Hiccup." I looked into my son's eyes and he didn't flinch away. "The King won't be a problem."

Hiccup didn't back down. "But,

"He won't be a problem," I insisted.

"But, Chief Stoick, the King he's-" Astrid began.

I drew my hand up to my lips and shushed her with a gesture. "Not a problem."

Astrid and Hiccup rolled their eyes and then glanced at Toothless and Stormfly. My youngest son and the Nadder-girl shook their heads, both apparently having enough sense not to give them any backup when they

knew it wouldn't help. Good, I could still stand up to my sons and their friends in a test of stubbornness.

I sheathed my sword and then turned to the group. "Now, I get he's powerful and all, maybe seemingly invincible," I told the teenagers, they all listened intently. "I don't care about that. What I want to know is how am I going to either appeal to him or to slay him!"

"You _can't!" _Hiccup insisted. "You're not even in the same weight class as him, like literally!"

"So he's big!" I spat. "Most dragons are big and they go down all the same!" I shook my head and leveled my anger. I was so upset at the King for forcing Val to go through this and that was clouding my judgement. I needed to appeal to him and that wasn't going to happen if I wanted to chop his head off. "Boys, I just want to know what I am dealing with."

Hiccup groaned. "And you say I make things difficult."

I grinned. "You get that attitude from me. Now, tell me, be honest with me."

The kids all turned to each other, wordlessly wondering what to say to me no doubt.

Toothless stepped forward and spoke up. "The King, he has power, sorcery of his own."

I frowned. "How powerful is he?"

Hiccup cringed "He's powerful, Dad, powerful enough to bestow it upon others." He raised his hand up and a golden light shone from his left hand, the power he used to dispel the curse upon Berk. Suddenly I realized where he went all those weeks ago.

I bit my lip. This King was definitely not going to be like any ordinary dragon I ever faced. It was bad enough I was facing the leader of the dragons, now I had to deal with a powerful sorcerer. I swallowed my indecision and fear. My odds were definitely going down and I needed an edge. "Alright, tell me what can he do to me?"

"The King can get inside your head," commented Astrid. "Show you things that-"

But before I could think on her words, a low thud reverberated through the hull. The hatch opened and a Trader Al climbed down the step ladder. "We have returned to the Nest and my Lord has decided to hold an audience with you," declared the man, spitting at my direction.

I didn't back away and glared him down. I still harbored a deep hatred for that man for kidnapping Hiccup and coming to take my wife away hasn't made him earn his way back into my good graces. "Good, the sooner I can speak to him, the sooner I can go home with my family." The man hissed something in some foreign tongue and then step off.

"Gee, Dad, you sure know how to make friends," Hiccup said

deadpan.

I smirked and approached the stepladder. "Well, look on the bright side, we both equally hate each other." My sons both shook their heads. "Anyways, I guess whatever kind of dragon this King is, I'll have to see it with my own eyes."

I then climbed up the ladder and saw for the first time the dragon nest in all of its glory. Above us, there was a tall mountain, maybe a volcano by the look of the exposed peak. Sparse snow frosted trees dotted the side of the island we were facing, making me wonder if the area would be more fertile on the otherside. Little specs, dragons, flew all over, forming practical _clouds_ in their frenzied flight. And it was all soâ€ clear, so easily transparent, not at all obscured.

Behind me, I saw the familiar sea stacks and obscuring fog of Helhiem's Gate. I've sailed through those waters for nearly thirty years and never made any progress getting through them. Now, I was through the fog and at my destination, beholding it with my two eyes. Now I just wish I had an army at my back.

The ship had apparently landed in a cave of some sort, hiding away from the rest of the island. And as if to make it even more obscure, fog was creeping all over the deck. Thankfully, it also hid a scene I did not want any part of.

Trader Al and his men were disembarking the ship and not in a fashion that I would call tasteful. Each of the men returned to their natural state, removing the trappings of humanity and as well as familiar looking pieces of jewelry. The dragons flew over and around the ship in a manner that was quite clearly some sort of patrol route.

About the others left on the top deck were Val and someone who should not be named. "I honestly do not know what you see in that, man, Dead Wings," the man spat in my wife's ear. "My name is Valhallarama and I don't care what you think," she scolded. "Now if you don't mind, leave me." I found myself grinning internally. That was my wife, for sure.

The man hissed. "As you wish." He sneered in my direction and then went to greet the kids who made their way out. "It is good to see you all return. I would hope that thoseâ€ _savages_ have treated you well," he said, sounding strangely polite about it, barring his emphasis. He then went on to give the teenagers directions for addressing the King, apparently, it was a matter of protocol for them.

I tuned the man out, mostly because the conversion didn't need to involve me. Now, I had more important things to concern me. Val and I approached each other, arms wide. We both threw ourselves at each other and held on tight, as if we were having another reunion after fifteen years.

"I'm so sorry, Stoick," she said, her tone carrying as much remorse as it could. "I wish it didn't have to be this way."

"I know, love," I said, my own voice not all too different from her's. "But I promise you, we'll still be together after this, I swear it."

I don't know how long we held each other in our arms, but by the time we let go, there were far fewer teenagers on the deck and a certain somebody was now a seven pound dragon barking orders from the ship's mast. Oh, how I wanted to grab hold of that head and pop it off its shoulders.

Fishlegs was just putting Meatlug's clothes away, the female Gronckle gave the large boy a few licks to keep him from shivering. The twins were both discussing some sort of conversation with Barf and Belch and despite the fact they no longer shared a language, they were going about it as if they were. As for Snotlout, he did what he always did.

"Ow!" Snotlout squealed, jumping on one leg and holding on to his wounded toe.

"You never learn!" shouted Astrid as she climbed aboard Stormfly.

The Nadder nodded her head in agreement, still understanding Norse.

Snotlout went over to Hookfang and leapt on top of the Nightmare. His expression became gloomy and defeated. Sorry nephew, but I think my son won the prize.

Val approached my defeated nephew, a faint smile on her face. "Is there room for me?"

Snotlout's face immediately lit up. "Uh, yes, uh-"

"I'll take that as a 'yes'," she laughed as she climbed aboard.

I would have joined my wife aboard the Nightmare, but there was little room for me and my big butt. So, instead, I climbed aboard Meatlug. "Well, I've got to hand it to you, you picked a strong woman," I joking told the boy.

He blushed. "Uh... thank you?" he said, sounding so uncertain.

I laughed, almost matching Meatlug's own vibrations. "It's a compliment boy!"

"Uh, right!" said Fishlegs, climbing aboard.

Toothless and Hiccup were able to join Astrid aboard Stormfly, their combined body weight not a problem for the Nadder. She screeched and took over in the air, leading the way for the other dragons to follow her.

We flew up and I immediately felt like I felt like my stomach fall past my legs by the surprisingly sudden take off. Meatlug might have been the slowest of the lot, but she was still airworthy. It was breath to see the the ship shrink until it could have fit inside my palms, the chilly wind blasting on my face. The volcano didn't even seem in the least bit intimidating from this height, in fact, I was thinking flying made it the equivalent of taking a walk to a neighbor's house.

At least, that's how I felt until we started to descend. Stormfly dove right into the volcano, swift as could be, signalling for the others to follow suit. Meatlug might have been a dragon who had an unusual way of flying, but that didn't mean she wasn't capable of swooping down if she didn't feel like it. The moment we tilted downwards, I immediately gripped onto anything I could, fearing that I might fall if I let go. I didn't scream or panic, but I sure did not feel perfectly safe. Fishlegs honestly, did not so much as bat an eye.

Inside the volcano, I saw dragons upon dragons gathered there, each sitting on various stone cliffs that permeated the dragon nest. We Vikings were right in assuming the place was the primary home for a large quantity of dragons, but seeing them all there made me think the place was closer to a city than any sort of animal den.

We dove past them and eventually made our way to the near bottom of the nest, a few stone platforms surrounded by reddish.

Stormfly and the dragons landed on one of the platforms, letting those of us without wings the chance to disembark. I patted Meatlug on the head to congratulate her and she licked my hand in turn.

"She said that means she's thankful," said Fishlegs.

One of the other platforms was strangely empty, while Trader Al and the dragons that served under him occupied the other.

"Our King, we have come!" cried the little Terror. "Appear before us!" He might have been nothing but a speck at this distance, but his voice could be heard as audibly as if I stood right next to him.

The ground shook, like a miniature earthquake was about to happen. Then, something came out from the red fog, the massive head of a creature that would have been utterly impossible to place on any fireplace save Thor's. The King was massive, a being that could have devoured fleets and legions if he so desired. "**As you have spoken, my Kin, I shall hold this audience,"** he spoke in a voice that could have shook mountains to their knees.

Dragons and not dragons all around bowed before the massive creature. Even Toothless and Astrid bowed before him and I didn't blame them. I slightly bent my head over, giving the King a very basic respect since this was his land.

That act for some reason caused the King's massive spheres that served as eyes to zero in on me, radiating some sort of intense pressure that could only have been hate of an unimaginable degree. "**And to those who lack our tongue, I will lend it to you, even to those**_** undeserving **_**of it, "** said the King. It was only then I realized that the King was not speaking Norse, but rather in roars, grunts, and growls that somehow managed to be understood as words. Boy, Hiccup wasn't kidding when he said that he power, I just wish, well, they told me that I was facing down what must have been one of Loki's kids.

"I thank you." I said, attempting to sound at least somewhat polite and not at all afraid. I think I did a good job, though I really don't get why the King has it out for me.

The King growled, but I didn't back away. I am far too stubborn to be frightened off by an overgrown lizard. He then shifted his gaze over to the teenagers. **"Step forward last students of One Eye."** **The dragons all stepped forward and I backed away to give the floor to them.**

"What is it, my Lord?"

"Yeah," Belch said.

"Um-" Barf said.

The King gave what sounded like a hearty laugh done by an earthquake. **"You have done well, young ones. You have survived and avenged your fallen Flight by fighting and defeating many of the Usurper's forces since you last visited leave. When I am done with other business, stay and let us discuss the matter further."**

The dragon's expressions all seemed to turn a little pale, but they all bowed down. In particular Stormfly took a glance over at Toothless, as if wanting to say something but didn't. "Weâ€| shall," she said, obviously hesitating about something.

I saw the King's expression turn a darker, obviously displeased by something, but he didn't say it either. **"Very well, you are dismissed. Dead Wings come forth!"**

At the King's request Val stepped up and approached the massive dragon. She didn't look at me, her expression hard as granite. "I have come as you asked my King," she said, bowing only slightly enough to actually call it a bow.

The King nodded his massive head. **"Good. In the next few weeks, once the bindings that surpress your true form weaken, you shall resume your-"**

I swallowed my fear and stepped forward, bringing myself between my wife and a monster fit for the epics. I did the craziest thing I ever imagined and interrupted the King. "She's not!" I spat, not even caring about anything other than the fact she was either staying or going. "My wife's coming home with me!" I demanded. The King was already writing off my wife as his and I couldn't stand it.

The King's blasted hot smoke for him nostrils, upset at me. **"And you presume you have power over me?"**

I stared at the massive dragon, his six eyes peering in to my two, barely controlled rage bubbling in the two of us. He hated me for seemingly no reason, but I hated him because he was all that was in the way of having my family whole.

"This is crazy, Dad!" I heard Hiccup shout.

"Yeah, this is a bit much!" added Toothless.

I raised my hand in the air, telling them to let me handle the situation. "I'm willing to talk things out." I tried to keep my voice level, suppressing my emotions enough to maybe set things up for a negoation. "I want my wife back, now what do you want for her?"

The King laughed as if I was making some sort of joke.

I barely held it together. "I'm willing to offer tribute," I shouted. "Fish, meat, several bushels every month in exchange for a truce and my wife!" I turned my back just long enough to see that everyone behind me was looking at me like I was a madman.

"**I no interest in such things," **replied the King.** "Though my body does require nourishment, such a price is not worth losing my finest Flight Commander. My Kin, especially under her command bring me much."**

I narrowed my eyes. I wasn't giving up on negotiating just yet. "Then what do you have interest in?"

The King's teeth shone, a smile that could have reduced me to nothing but toothpicks. "**You," **said the King.

"Me?" I might have been surprised, but I did my best to sound deadpan about it. I had no idea how much I was worth and as much as I wanted to have my wife back, I needed to know if this was a smart deal to make.

"**You," **the King confirmed, his eyes all focusing on me intently. "**You are wasted potential, a weakling, in my eyes." **I knew the King was trying to get a reaction out of me, but I didn't let him. I kept silent and let him continue. "**And yet, you have yet to succumb to the Corrupt One's curse."**

I smirked. So, that was it. Whatever granted me resistance against Alvin's magical spear, it interested the King. I'm still changing, but at the rate I was going, it was like I wasn't getting anywhere. "And?"

"**I desire a test, a test to see if you are capable of performing a specific task on my behalf." **said the King. "**If you pass this test, then we will have something worth exchanging."**

"Then, start it!" I stepped forward.

The King's smile grew even larger and I suddenly became aware that somethingâ€¦ felt different. My hairs stood on end, like a small jolt of lightning was coursing through me. My vision grew blurry and red mist swirled over me. Yet through all that, I didn't back away, I didn't cower. Whatever this test was, I was ready for it. It was my one shot to keep Val and was not going to blow it.

When I could see clearly again, the world was a very different placeâ€¦ and that was putting it mildly. I was no longer in a massive cavernous space in the heart of some long dead volcano, in fact, I was sure I was pretty much nowhere. There were no walls, only an empty expanse of golden sky and a silveryâ€¦ ground. The sky seemed perfectly normal, like something a particularly bright and sunny day might have, but the ground just defied definition. It was like looking into almost perfectly clear water, rather than anything more mundane.

I stepped forward, perplexed by my odd surroundings. As I did, ripples surged forth from wherever I stepped, behaving as if the ground was actual water. Boy, this place was maddening. I was alone

in this strange place; no else one was here, not my wife, not my kids, no one but me. Or at least, that's what it seemed like at first. The ripples I made all then seemed to converge onto one spot. From there, a tall figure rose from the water-like ground.

Once the man had fully arisen, I took note of his features. He was a tall, muscular man with bronze tanned skin. His brown hair was long enough to reach his shoulders and yet it was equal parts wild and unkempt and regal andâ€¦ breathtaking. His body looked like something out of one of those statues one of the other Tribe pilfered from the Romans, like it was chiseled to absolute and exacting standards. He may have only worn a loincloth, but that little garment was embroidered with golden designs, far more intricate and fancier than anything I ever wore in my life. And for some reason, I knew perfectly well who I was looking at.

I clenched my fists and tried to keep myself under control. Just looking at the King made me sick to my stomach, a strong impulse to weep at my own imperfection and flaws ran through. Sure, I was able to quickly get over the fact he was some sort of gigantic sorceress dragon, but seeing him here in human form, looking far more perfect than any man right to be was something else. I grabbed hold of my sword to keep my grip on reality; I was not going to show weakness to thisâ€¦ man.

The King stepped forward, his footsteps drawing ripples to his own feet in seemingly perfect motions. **"It has been a long time since I shown any creature, Kin or otherwise, this face," **he said, his voice still able to shave me to my bones. **"Pity, it had to be you, but I suppose that could not be helped. Perhaps you should consider this a great honor."**

"Where are we?" I couldn't stand to focus on the King's appearance, so I brushed his rambling off and ignored his question completely. I was here for one reason and one reason alone, not to make chit chat over how much better the ruler of all dragons looked in human form. "Give me that test!" I demanded.

The King scowled in my direction, seemingly finding more reasons to dislike me. "As you wish," he spat. **"The test shall begin."** Then, he lunged at me.

I had only a split-second to draw my sword and parry his attack before I even realize what happened. Within the blink of an eye, I found my sword over my head, its guard holding off another blade made of blackened steel, its pattern like flowing water. I gave a howl of challenge and maneuvered my blade to make a counter swing, diverting his blade away from me while I made a lunge.

However, the King was not a novice at swordplay. He side stepped my strike and then made another lunge in at me.

I quickly broke from my attack and just barely managed to parry the blow.

Then, seemingly coming to a silent agreement, both of us stepped backwards. **"So it is not a fluke you have made it this far,"** commented the man.

"I didn't become the Chief because I inherited it!" I challenged,

holding my sword over my head, but not too far away I couldn't parrying a sudden attack. "I got where I did because I was one of the best warriors Berk had ever seen!"

The King scowled at me, obviously disliking my accomplishments. ****"And like all such warriors, you slew many of my Kin to get to that rank!"****

"You keep sending them at Berk!" I protested. "What else were we supposed to do? Sit there and let the dragons take everything that belonged to us!"

"_Yes!"**_**the King hissed. ****"For that is how things **_**should**_**be!"****He dove in right after me again and swung his sword at me again. I side stepped out of the way, ducking and weaving through a volley of strikes and parrying where possible. The King was definitely angry at me and I felt his rage even through my sword.

To buy myself a little time, I threw my body at the King and we both toppled into the ground, my body on top of his. He threw me off with his arm and we both staggered onto our feet. I was faster though and found myself standing before the King was fully up right. I kicked the King down and I took this opportunity to go on the offensive. I brought my sword over the King's head and he was forced to guard himself against a series of heavy blows, his position leaving him little room for a counter attack. "You took my wife away from me for fourteen years!" I shouted, each blow containing a shard of my anger and rage.

If anything I could have ever said the upset the King, that was it. He screamed and howled with frustration and struck my blade, shattering it into a dozen pieces. I took several paces, my mouth agape, the finest sword I could have ever gotten and it wasn't a match for the King's.

The King literally burned with anger, a small torrent gathering at his feet. ****"I protected her from **_**you!"**_**He shouted, his hatred of me barely contained. With a wave of his blade, fog rose from the ground forming shapes and images of a long forgotten memory. ****"Long ago, you sentenced her to to die."****

I looked into the clouds and saw myself, fourteen years ago, facing down a dragon. Back then, I was looking for my wife after she disappeared for a month on another of her adventures. Normally, I would have left her alone, but at the time, I felt guilty because we had a fight the last time we saw each other, so I went to track her down and apologize. If only I knew then what I knew now.

In my memories, the Night Fury before me did not speak Norse, but in here with the King showing me the vision, I understood the dragon perfectly. "Please Stoick, help me!" it cried in Val's familiar tone.

I ignored the plea for help and lunged at the dragon.

"Stoick, it's me! Please, help me!" it plead, again, not realizing the man before him was too shortsighted to consider the truth.

I ignored the beast before me and struck again. This time, I drew blood on the beast's foreleg and it fled before I could land a fatal

blow.

The King stepped through the vision, his anger still burning. **"My Flight Commander spent months mulling over these thoughts, wondering why **

"I didn't know it was her!" I argued. That didn't make me feel any less justified. I came close to ending my own wife right then and there. I was upset at the time. I spent weeks tracking my wife down, only to find an abandoned ship, so I took out my frustrations on the nearest creature there, the very person I have been looking for.

"**Some mate, you are," **the King scolded. **"You saw a beast and attacked it!" **Then, the image of Val suddenly became more solid, appearing as an exact replica of the dragon I saw all those years ago. The fake Val lunged at me, teeth extended and growling. I ducked out of the way, evading the Night Fury's attack. Unsatisfied, the beast began circling around me, putting me on edge.

"Is this part of the test, too?" I asked, my eyes not leaving the dragon. She was Valhallarama only in form, having not a shred of her compassion or thought, an actual beast.

"**In a way," **the King replied. He sheathed his sword and inspected the me and circling the predator. **"And what about your youngest son?" **

Another figure formed out of cloud stuffs appeared before my eyes, Toothless had his head bowed down and I had my sword over him, ready to chop it off. It was several months ago, back when I first learned the truth of him, well, being born a dragon. "I love my son and I know it was wrong of me to do that!"

"**Pah! Your first instinct was to slay your own child!" **the King shouted. The image of Toothless shifted form, growing larger and absorbing the cloud based replica of myself. Another Night Fury broke out of the clouds, joining his slightly larger mother by circling opposite of her.

I gulped, now getting very nervous. My eyes were having a hard time keeping of the two of them. I just knew the moment I ran I would get cut down right then and there. Now I really wish I brought a shield and an extra sword.

The King laughed at my predicament, clearly drawing some kind of satisfaction at my expense. **"And your eldest son, need I explain what you've done wrong to him?" **

"No, I know what I did wrong with him."

"**Oh, do tell." **the King spoke, feigning surprise. Then, a ghostly image of Hiccup as a Night Fury joined the rest of the family and became a very real looking beast, hungry for my blood in a way I never thought I could see Hiccup's face possible. I used to see dragons as beasts, now I was looking at my own family and seeing them as how I used to.

If only because I thought it would keep me alive a little longer, I indulged the King. "I thought that by becoming a dragon, he was being

madeâ€| less of himself."

The King scoffed at my word choice. **"A strange statement, when in truth becoming one of my Kindred made him far more capable, enough to meet and exceed the standards you would have set for him. He was better off from the transfiguration." **

The beastial version of Hiccup growled and drew closer to me and it took all I had in me to not turn and run. Instead, I turned and faced him, my hand extended. "But after all that, I think I learned something."

The King tilted his head, inquisitive. **"And what pray tell is that?"**

"That no matter what Hiccup became, he would always my son." I placed my hand on gently Hiccup's nose. The dragon didn't bite my hand and his growling stopped, replaced by a contented purr. Slitted eyes widened and relaxed becoming a goofy look my son used to give back when he was excited. The dragon assaulted me not with bites and scratches, but a flurry of licks and slobber. "Alright, boy, calm down, calm down!" I pushed my son away, just in time for the other dragons to make their move.

Toothless and Val approached me, their fangs bared and ready to end my life, but I knew better than to fight them. I instead had my arms out, ready to receive them. Somehow, I don't know how, but I was able to grab hold and stand my ground against charging Night Furies. And instead of beginning a vicious grapple, we did something else far more pleasant. "Hey, I haven't forgotten about either of you!" I declared, holding on tight in a hug. Hiccup join in, apparently feeling he was left out. That was fine, there was plenty of room.

I don't know how long I stood there holding on to them, but eventually, I had to let go. And when I did, the false images of my family as dragons immediately faded into oblivion.

The King gave me a look of genuine surprise; he never anticipated this outcome and it shown on his face. **"Anâ€| interesting subversion to feign sympathy in the face of-"**

I immediately shook my head and disagreed. "I'm not lying. I love my family, even if they are dragons!" I declared. "And once I am through with you, I'll be sure to tell them that!" Power surged through me and it wasn't merely adrenaline running through my veins. I don't know what power or impulse told me to do this, I lifted up the broken hilt of my sword and lightning struck it.

The King looked at me with fear, his expression turning pale at the sight my new blade.

My sword was made anew, its broken blade replaced by solidified lightning that crackled with energy. "I'm done with this test!" I bellowed and charged at the King.

He raised his blade to defend himself, but that did him no good. I melted his fancy sword and drove my slice through his shoulder.

And then everything turned dark.

My eyes fluttered open and I suddenly found myself back in the volcano, on the ground for some reason. Toothless, Hiccup, and Val were all gathered around me, concerned looks in their eyes.

"Stoick!" Val cheered. "You're awake!"

"Dad!" Hiccup and Toothless shouted simultaneously.

I groaned. "Keep it down will, ya?" I put my palm through my temples and felt very woozy. I don't know what happened, but my head felt like it had been hit my Thor's hammer one too many times.

"You're alright!" declared Toothless.

"We were worried!" screamed Hiccup.

"Course I'm alright!" I said. I picked myself up and dusted off my clothes. "Why, wouldn't I-" It was at this point I saw that everyone else, even the twins who normally don't pay much attention to anything were all looking at something.

Turning around, I saw what had happened to the King. Now that I was awake and outside of the vision, I knew the King and I were sharing some sort of mental connection that allowed us fight each other in a dream. The thing was, I think the dream might have been a little too intense for the King's liking. During the vision, the King apparently crashed his head into the deserted platform, taking off a solid third of its mass. Blood oozed out of the massive dragon's wounds and dripped all over the stone. And on the King's shoulders, there was a massive burn mark that blackened his hardened scales, like he had been branded by some sort of force.

Dragons from all over gathered around their fallen Lord, concerned. Trader Al, in particular was discussing things over to an entire legion of Terrible Terrors to try to stop the bleeding.

I quickly unsheathed my sword, noting that it was no longer broken nor made of electricity. It was all supposed to be a dream, yet, how was it even possible for a dream to nearly kill someone, let alone a great big dragon like that? All I did was want to strike the King down, not nearly kill him and have the entire nest outraged!

The King stirred and the dragons that surrounded him all quickly flew off. "Our Lord! You're injured, rest!" declared Trader Al.

The King though was apparently as stubborn as I was and kept moving upward. ***"I understand your concern, Ruseclaw, but there are important matters we should attend to."***

"Yes! We must imprison the one that hurt you!" declared the tiny dragon. "The feedback was far greater than anticipated."

The King shook his massive head. ***"No, I still have business to discuss." ***The King then turned to me. This time, I was not afraid of him, not any more. I brought him low once, that was enough for me to say I could stand up and fight if need be. ***"It appears that I was wrong about somethingsâ€¦!"***

I nodded and gave a glance to my family. "No matter what, nothing

will stop me from protecting my family.

"**I suppose I can respect thatâ€¦|"** admitted the King. He moved his bleeding head over to and placed it as close as he could to the platform I stood on. "**Regardless, now that you can offer me something of value, we now have something to bargain with."**

My heart did several somersaults. While I know I was able to face down the King and injure him, I doubted I could actually beat him and make off with my wife and kids unless I could actually summon swords made of lightning. But, a bargain was a sure fire way to have everything I could ever want. "I'm listening," I said as I stepped forward.

"**You can offer me something no other He- being could."**

"And what would that be?"

The King gave me a crooked smile, his his teeth dripping with blood and satisfaction. "**My freedom." **I heard the dragons all over the cavern gasp in stunned surprise, whatever that meant, it was a big deal.

"Your freedom?"

The mere nodding of the Kings head could have caused tidal waves. "**I have been bound to this place for hundreds of years, passing each age without leaving this prison. But you can release me."**

I just stared at the dragon. It was hard to think a dragon like him would be trapped and imprisoned underneath a mountain. How was a massive being like him able to be confined by any worldly means? I shook my head. Then again, Fenris was bound by nothing but string. "And why should I set you free? It seems quite clear that the gods locked you up in here!"

The King shook his head. "**The Oathbreaker may be detestable but neither he nor any of his kind have done nothing to bind me. I do not have any involvement with any of them, save only in passing."** I saw his gaze narrow to focus on me, anger still seething, but he had had better control now. "**It does not matter who bound me to this place, only that you may release me."**

"Again, why should I?" I challenged. My position suddenly seemed stronger, like I actually had a leg to stand upon. The King really desperately wanted me to set him free. Odin only knew how I was going to do thatâ€¦| and the consequences of that. What would a world where this massive dragon roamed free be like?

"**My prison is already failing to hold me," **explained the King. "**Originally, my bindings would have forced me to sleep for all eternity, but through the actions of my Kin, my Knights, I was able overcome and resist that enchantment."** Dozens of dragons all bowed down in humility and subservience to the great dragon and the King gave them a satisfied look

"Then why do you need me?"

"**For you can hasten the destruction of these bindings, to construct them. An age from now these bindings will be no more, however, I

would rather my chains broken before this age's ending."**

I contemplated the King's word seriously, considering the possibility. I don't know whether or not the great dragon spoke the truth. He clearly wanted me to doâ€| unbind him. I shuddered to think what kind of destruction the dragon would unleash upon the world, but then again, he did appear desperate. "You'll let me have my wife back? And you won't harm Berk?" I probably should have added stuff about my allies, but there was no way I was going to push him just yet.

The King nodded his massive head. **"I will not destroy your homeland, nor usurp your rulership of it. Once I am free, I will do everything my power to ensure that you and my Flight Commander shall remain together." **He then brought his massive head closer to the platform, stopping only when he was an inch away from the stone. **"All you must do is willingly smear me with your blood, a single droplet will suffice." **

I turned back to my family. Everyone had mostly gone into stunned silence and only stirred once I brought my attention to them. The only reason I was even considering this course of actions was because I wanted to have my family, all of it. I needed to know what their faces told me.

Hiccup and Toothless both gave me solemn looks, the color drained from their faces. They looked unsure of the decision. Hiccup obviously got his power to break the spell Alvin wrought over Berk from the King and that worked out just fine. Toothless, well, he probably served the King before he found his way home and he didn't seem to distrust the great dragon.

Val was the only one who knew "Stoick, this is-

"Crazy?" Hiccup supplied.

"Hairbrained?" Toothless added.

I nodded. "It stuff runs in the family." I then turned to the King, his head unmoving as a statue as he waited for my decision.

"Stoick, the King will live up the letter of his word, butâ€| I am unsure about this," cried my wife. "I don't know what he'll do-

I grabbed Val before she could continue speaking. I held her in my arms, a hold that was much easier to do since she wasn't a dragon. "He'll let us stay together, that's what matters!"

I then let go, leaving Val in stunned silence.

I then made my way over to the King and drew my sword. I deftly cut open my palm and then laid it on top of the King's massive nostrils. "It's done!" I shouted. "I set you free!"

A great earthquake struck the volcano, like some tremendous force had been release. Rocks and platforms fell all around me and the red fog that surrounded the King was swept up into the heavens. I backed away from the great dragon, his flesh glowing and radiating with power, power that I could _feel_. Upon the great and terrible dragon, his

wounds mended themselves, burn marks shrinking away and blood drying. It was a terrible and spectacular sight to witness what I did. Before long, everything stopped. The King stopped glowing, but his wounds remained healed. The rocks and destroyed platforms did not reassemble themselves, but the red fog still left the volcano.

When I approached the King, I nearly ended up emptying my bowels and I wasn't the only one who looked like they needed to use an outhouse. Without the red fog in the way, I saw the King from head to toe. The sheer size of his head gave me an idea of how big I suspected he could have been, but in hindsight that estimate seemed far too conservative. **"I am free,"** said the King, sounding so pleased with himself that I couldn't help but feel afraid.

"You areâ€¦" I said to myself, mostly to keep my grip on reality. I did not have illusions about facing this dragon on open combat and coming out alive. At best, I could delay the inevitable.

The King focused his size eyed gaze upon me, his expression satisfied. **"And now that I am free, I will fulfill the bargain that was struck."** He then turned to Trader Al and his dragons, their mouths stuck agape looking at their Lord in his entirety. **"Seize him!"**

"What!" I hastily picked up my sword in stunned silence. The dragons under Trader Al's control all came barreling in at me, a dozen to one. I fended off the dragons for for a few moments, just enough time to shout my outrage. "We had a deal!" I was about to expect him to send an order to have me and my friends and family returned home, but this was outright double crossing!

"And so we did. I am simply enacting the necessary steps to fulfill it. Rest assure, I will tear down your defenses, physical, mental, spiritual and make you anew," The King declared. **"Your territory shall remain yours, but certain adjustments needed to be made."**

I shouted in protest. This was not the deal.

I did my best to hold off the dragons, but it was all for nought. It was one thing to fight dragons one on one or even two or three at a time, but dozens of the beasties was something else entirely. I fell onto the ground face first, some larger, heavier dragon pinning me to the ground. My body ached, full of bites and scratches, but that pain was nothing compared to the pain my heart felt.

My vision grew cloudy and the only thing I could see through the hordes of dragons were my friends and family, standing there and wanting to come to my aid, but held back by a line of dragons. They all stared at me, even the ones who had been born as dragons, with horrified looks.

Before everything faded to blackness, I prayed that if any force in Midgard had any power over the King, it would end him.

* * *

><p>Boy this chapter was a major swing. The King is free, Stoick is imprisoned, and well, you'll have to read to find out what happens to the kids in the next chapter.

Ulfberht is a brand from what used to have been a line of swordsmiths known for masterwork blades. To those of you who know katanas, think Germaic Masamune and you wouldn't be far off. I would translate it, but no one seems to know what it means

29. Chapter 29

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Finally got this posted. Took a while and it might be shorter than usual, but at least now I know where to take this chapter.

Read, Enjoy, and Review.

* * *

><p>When I was a young hatchling, a small little thing, I used to dream about seeing something like this. In my dreams, I was always older, years ahead of where I was. I would have been a proud and noble knight, offering a Herd captive to my Lord and Liege, as was tradition before a Knight ascended to the final rank of Flight Commander and led the King's Flights. But now, looking at this, there was no way I couldn't be sick to my stomach, especially since this was my father I was talking about.<p>

He eventually stopped struggling, giving way to the dragons that tore into him. He didn't scream, didn't whimper, even as the dragons ripped him to shreds. It was only when he had been reduced to a bloody heap, beaten within an inch of death that I managed to see his face again. I wanted to scream, to run out to him and grab him to make sure he was alive in this time of dire need, but the dragons blocked the way, their gazes stony and unfeeling. To them, he wasn't much different from any other. I could only stare as my father was limpy being carried away, like he was nothing more than an oversized sack of potatoes as he was carried off to some hidden place.

I turned to my friends and my family. Hiccup and Mom were both looking like their hearts were torn into a thousand pieces and each my friends could only look with blank, awestruck expressions; even the twins, the only people I knew who could take anything and just roll with the punches, were still reeling from the shock, Barf and Belch doing their best to keep them from falling; Fishlegs was stuck close to Meatlug; Stormfly and Astrid were both looking quite pale; while Hookfang constantly tried to keep Snotlout's jaw from falling off, not an easy feat for a large dragon without hands.

Glancing at my once King, I couldn't help but feel a deep dread bubbling inside my chest just by looking at him. Why would he do this? Especially to my own father!

Right now, I wanted to scream at him, to break him down until he was nothing for what he's done. I would have ran and tried to accomplish the impossible, but Mom pulled me back.

"Our Lord, why do this!?" shouted my Mom, keeping me by her side. "My husband was undeserving of such a fate!"

The King's lifted a massive paw and brought it close our platform. The dragons deposited the my father on the King's limb and it was there he lay bleeding, dying. He looked like he could fall off at any moment, but thankfully he stayed there. **"I know you hold infatuation for this one and it is for the sake of you and your sons that I spare him. He is deserving of far greater than this, though admittedly for no fault other than than that of his forefathers'. However, unlike the Oathbreaker I will keep my promise, no matter how much I despise it. I am simply ensuring the best possible outcome."**

"Best possible outcome!?" shouted my Mom, she was seething with anger that I never knew she had in him. "How isâ€| doing _this _to him _better_?"

"**Because he will survive as well as perhaps lead to the sparing your homeland, though it does require me to change my stance on what constitutes as Kindred," **the King said. He then did what I couldn't help but think was a shrug of his massive shoulders. **"You have sought out to return to your homeland for years Dead Wings, I am simply allowing you return in a way that cannot conflict with your duties." **

"Don't call me that!" shouted Mom. "I- I should never have served you!" This almost stunned me out of my own anger at my King. Momâ€| for pretty much all my life was adamant in serving him. Well, it was about time, as far as I'm concerned.

The King then did sigh that shook the mountain, but me and my Mom stood firm. **"I understand that youâ€| hate me for this, but please, understand this was necessary."**

"How was any of this necessary!?" I barked, my outrage seeping through my every word. The dragons that once surrounded our father converged around him, not doing anything other than block his way. "My Dad's near dead because of you!"

"**Yet he lives. Young Night Fury, please do understand, that this is to your father's benefit," **said the King, sounding so sure of himself, I almost believed it to be true. The great dragon brought my father nearer to the platform, enough that we could see him. His arms were elongating and the beginnings of a tail were sprouting from his rear, sticking out the remains of his clothes. Unlike a moment ago when Dad was mostly human except for maybe odd eye colors and some stray scales on his skin, our father had had changed more drastically in mere minutes than he had in several months. **"It is unfortunate that I must do this, but your father is otherwise far too resistant, unaccepting. Rest assured, once he transfiguration is completed, he will still serve as your father. Admittedly, that would take more time than I am comfortable spending; his ability to resist is far greater than I thought."**

I shook my head. "But Dad, he shouldn't be like this!"

The King sighed again, **"Abandon any preconceived notions that allowing him to remain of the Herd is to his benefit. He is better off this way, as are you, youngest child."**

"But I'm a boy, a human boy!" I shouted. "I was supposed to be born,

not hatched! My beingâ€¦| _Kin _was _lie!"_

The King shook his head. **"Abandon that falsehood as well. You are Kin, this is truth, whether or not you understand it such. The rest of your family shall either become or return to being Kin and unless you take the necessary steps you'll be left behind."**

"What are you talking about?" Toothless shouted. "Earlier, you said something about Mom's...bindings weaken, what's that about?"

"**The spell your brother wrought was never meant to last," **said the King. **"Within a month's time those he applied the spell I had given him will revert."**

I turned to Hiccup, wanting to get answers from him. My brother kept his mouth shut, his expression sheepish. Iâ€¦| I really hope he never did any of this willingly. I know he dealt with the King to get the power he wanted to fixâ€¦| everything, but the idea he could be an accomplice in this madness was a real fear. I had my Mom back and if she turned back into a dragon, would I lose her? Would we go back to how things were before? Hiccup nervously grimaced, but he stepped forward.

"But we had a deal!" Hiccup shouted, turning to face the King. "Iâ€¦| just wanted to have my family home together for the Winter! Notâ€¦| this!" At least, it sounded like he wasn't intentionally ruining everything.

"**And I gave it to you, eldest child,"** the King said. **"A simple exchange on both our parts over a simple service and it has merely come to fruition. I required you to convey a simple message and granting you and your family a winter together was both part of the parcel and an advance payment."**

"What message?" I blurted out. Hiccup and I both locked our gazes at the much larger dragon, both of us very, very upset at his choice of actions.

"**Simply to bring your father here, not as a warlord with an army at his back, but as a single man." **The King then bowed his head, turning to our still father. His changes had stopped for now, but he was not waking up anytime soon.

"You meanâ€¦|. all of this was justâ€¦| to lure my husband here!" Hiccup and I could only stare at Mom as she shouted loud enough to rattle loose stone. My brother and I backed away from her, an overwhelming unease taking root in our hearts; neither of us wanted to be near her.

"**My Flight Commander, you more than anyone knows of his volatility. He would have never accepted any pact made between the two of us, not so long as he never understood our true nature. I have simply made arrangements for the correct circumstances to apply, though admittedly, there were several unforeseen complications; I had never intended your children to be incarcerated needlessly, for instance." **Suddenly, I felt my gut sink below my legs, understanding that maybe the whole reason I was sent to sink ships all those months ago on that one fateful night might _not _have had anything to do with sinking ships.

"But doing this to him! " Mom yelled. "My husband is the most bullheaded man I know, I'll give you that, but, this, this is wrong!"

The King shook his head. **"As are many things in this life, that much I have learned well, but did you truly believe that the Herd will accept you once they know of your truths? I have set this scenario aside, for your sake and planned this out for your benefit. I understand that these sacrifices wound you, but outcomes of them can potentially lead to greater benefits, for you and your familyâ€|""**

Mom suddenly looked like the wind her sails had been taken out. I knew the whole issue about what she did to take care of me still weighed down her heart and I hated the King with a passion for using that against her. She glanced at Hiccup and me, then at Dad, her expression looking worrisome. "But Stoick..."

***"Shall survive, but only due to you. Now then, my Flight Commander, you mustn't continue denying what you truly are any more than any of the young should." **Then, he turned his attention away from Mom and onto the row of dragons that stayed silent for most of the conversation, more specifically one. ***"Wouldn't you agree, Nadder?""**

"No!" refused the Nadder in question. "My King, you shouldn't be forcing her, not any of them, to turn back if they don't want to!" I turned to Stormfly, a smile on my face. I was glad to have her back, even against this seemingly large enemy.

The King's six eyed gaze seemed to burn with fire, but nothing happened other than a stern talking to. **"Perhaps, I shouldn't have bothered asking you, you have after all seem to have chosen to forsake your identity for nothing but mere trinkets andâ€|accommodations."**

Stormfly backed aside, looking embarrassed as she took a glancing look at the object tied to her leg. Though she was a Nadder now, she had Astrid tie her scarf to her foot, possibly as an appeal to fashion. She quickly took it off and then handed it over to me.

"Hey, you don't need do that!" I said. I hated the King for doing this to my friend, but there was little I could do; I mean, it wasn't like any of us could deny him, especially since this was his home turf.

"Well, it's not like I _need it_," she said, her face turning slightly purple from the blush of red.

"You're a terrible liar!" Astrid interjected, her gaze still focused on the King.

The King then shifted his gaze over to Hookfang. **"And what of you, Nightmare, perhaps you seek to return home? Your sister may not be here at the moment, but I am sure she will welcome you back with open wings."**

I turned to Hookfang, who seemed like he was about to snap at any moment. We hadn't really paid much attention to each other in the

past months, but we were arguably better friends as simply boys than we ever were as dragons. Maybe it had to do with the fact neither of us were being forced to spend time together. Either way, I wasn't going to leave him hanging. "Don't worry about it, just say what you think you need to say."

Hookfang, relieved, nodded his head and turned back to the King. "I think I would rather stay with my Liege and my friend, all things considered. "

Snotlout gave a big smile, a little proud of that statement. "Heh, knew it!"

The King glowered at them both. "**I suppose it was my mistake for allowing your grandfather nominate you to be a Squire. You had little will or desire to do so on your own.**"

Hookfang backed away, looking somewhat ashamed.

Snotlout noticed this. "Hey!" he snapped, but the King didn't pay him any attention.

"**Regardless, perhaps it is my fault for inuring to sloth and disinteresting you from returning home, but I suppose serving another Kin works just as well." **Hookfang looked down at the floor like he wanted to pretend no one could see him. The King was definitely striking a low blow; no matter how polite he sounded, he was shaming my friends and I hated him for it.

He then turned to Meatlug, who gave out a squeak, sounding more like a mouse than a dragon. "M-my Lord!" she bowed hastily.

"**Arise," **declared the King. Meatlug did so. "**Now, don't you wish to return?"**

"I do!" Meatlug declared, her voice unsteady and shrill. "I've learned so much about from them my time away, their culture, their technology; that knowledge should be shared with all Kin."

The King glowered as every bit as upset as when the others refused to return back to the nest. "**That would be unwise, the Herd have little to offer us." **He turned to Fishlegs. "**I take it this is the one that inspired you to take such action?"**

Fishlegs nodded, just as nervous. "Uhâ€¦ yes sir!" he declared, nervously. Under normal circumstances, he would never have been able to know what the King said to him, but the spell the King created was still in place, completely shattering the limitations of speech.

The King looked at him thoughtfully, as if considering something. "**Hm, I suppose out of many potentialâ€¦ mates the Gronckle could have chosen, you do not seem too ill suited, barring the obvious." **

"Uh, thank you?" cried the larger boy. Then, Fishlegs and Meatlug both blushed, for reasons I couldn't understand. I mean, I don't think either of them were really, well, an item, were they? I mean, it's not like holding hands for minutes at a time really meant things, did it?

"**I suppose that problem should work itself out, eventually, but I advise against informing our Kin of what you learned among the Herd."
**Then, the great dragon turned to the Zippleback, Barf and Belch.
"And as for you, what decision have you made?"

The two heads finally stopped trying to keep the twins from falling over to take notice and bowed politely to the King. Both heads bared their teeth in nervous smiles.

"We must decline-" said Barf.

Belch added, "We have prior commitments."

"Yeah!" Tuffnut added. "We've got plans ()"

Ruffnut nodded her head. "It's going to be awesome!"

Then, the four of them all bashed their heads together and dizzily shambled off in separate directions, muttering gibberish along the way.

"**I suppose that is the most valid reason to refuse," **the King muttered. **"One can hardly allow prior commitments to expire."**

It was at this time, Trader Al, Ruseclaw, or whatever his real name was, decided to fly over to much larger dragon. "My Lord, I warned you this would happen if you sent them along with me; now they have been corrupt due to their time among the Herd!"

"**Unfortunately." **

"Well, it's not like they are better off! They never had any friends help them out while they were trapped, they pretty much spent the whole duration in prison and suffering death threats every day!" declared my brother, clearly sarcastic. Hiccup stepped forward to meet the King, looking as mad as I felt. He had no weapons with him, but the dragons who stood in between him and the great creature backed away. "I mean, it was you who ordered them to go to the village, so don't you think that you have to give them a little choice in this?"

I joined beside him, not because I didn't want to look like a coward in comparison, but because I wanted to let the King know how I felt about all this. "You don't get to decide to for us!"

"**Your opinions are noted," **the massive dragon declared, his eyes focusing on us exclusively. **"Does anyone else feel that way?"**

The first to come join us was Stormfly, who gave me a light lick to my back as she approached.

Astrid seemed to hesitate for a moment, but eventually she joined in after.

To my surprise, the rest of our friends, both dragon and human, came to step behind us, wordlessly challenging the King despite the fact he could flatten us all with a wave of his hands.

"**So is that how it is?"** the great dragon murmured. He gently

deposited my Dad's still form onto one of the nearby platforms and focused his six eyes on all of us. **"Then, so be it!"** the King then raised one of his massive paws and then I think I realized the folly of what we had just done.

Both my brother and I turned to each other, our expressions pale. We both immediately understood that we might have just led our friends into some sort of death sentence and there was now nothing we could do to stop it. We challenged the King's authority too strongly and now we had to pay for it.

The only one who never joined us in defying was Mom, who was begging in front of the greater dragon, her hands wildly making up desperate gestures. "No, don't do this my Lord!"

"It is no longer my choice, but theirs," said the great dragon. **"I know they are your children and some may be your students, but they must learn the hard way there is a price to everything."**

"Give them a head start, give them time to run!" declared my Mom much to my surprise. For as long as I knew her, Mom never let me run away from anything, ever.

"And what do you have to offer in exchange?"

"Me." She then approached the dragon and bowed all the way to the ground. "I'll serve you once more, without hesitation, just let them go!"

"Mom, don't do this!" I shouted.

"I mean, it's my crazy plan, you don't have to do another!"

"I already have your service, but I suppose enough time to mount would be sufficient," mused the King, sounding like he wasn't paying any attention to us.

Mom nodded at the King and then turned to Hiccup and me. "Okay, now you two should get going now, while you still have the chance."

"But Mom!"

"What about-" I asked

"I said go!" she screamed. Suddenly, I felt an overwhelming sense of dread, slam into me like it was a tangible feeling. Mom didn't change form, but I felt scared of her, just as things were months before. Those words, they felt so powerful, ringing in my ears constantly. Hiccup and I could only stare in bewilderment at what Mom had just did. Was that her gift, her power bestowed upon her by the King. "What are you waiting for, go!"

Hiccup and I felt compelled to obey, the raw fear our mother gave us wasn't the kind of thing we felt like resisting. We both got up on Stormfly along with Astrid, while the other teenagers got on their respective dragon partners.

Then, everyone took off and flew out the mouth of the volcano.

"I hate leaving Mom and Dad behind!" I shouted, as we left the mountain. I hoped I would see my parents again, because now after I finally had them, I hated the idea of suddenly losing them again.

"She'll be fine!" assured Astrid. "She's wasn't one of the toughest Flight Commanders for nothing!"

Then, things got worse for all of us. The King, for as large of a dragon as he was, did not fit through the sky entrance of the volcano's mouth. Instead, he made the mouth bigger. Stone and rock burst out in random directions, scattering debris as the large dragon tore its way through.

The twins both gave awed expressions and colorful descriptions of how they would pull off that stunt, meanwhile, everyone else took the situation more seriously.

"I just hope we survive to find out!" declared Hiccup.

"Thick skull, perfect for bashing through stoney wallsâ€|" Fishlegs muttered.

"Better hang on!"shouted Stormfly, swooping downward to gain momentum faster.

"**Long has it been since I had ever partaken in any hunt or defended my right to rule by my own merits!" **said the King. He busted through the mouth and for the first time in since ever, I saw the King's body in its entirety. His head was tiny in comparison to his massive form, endowed with massive muscles and thick carapace at every angle. Worst of all, he had wings, massive things that could block out the entire sun over Berk if he so desired. He unfurled his wings and with surprising speed, he dove in right after us.

"Stormfly, faster! We need to get out here!" I shouted.

Everyone flew off, diving as fast and as far as they could in beeline, but the King was right at our tails, almost close enough to make one biting lunge. It was so unfair, the King was so massive, yet he was so fast, fast enough that I had little doubt he could have chased after me if I was the one flying against him.

Meatlug and Fishlegs were the slowest, almost with in reach. The King opened his massive maw, drawing in air before would set his breath alight. There was nothing we could do.

Then something happened. The King was stopped in his tracks. I don't mean he let us go, I mean something stopped him.

There was a brief, a very intense flash of light and instead of following us, the King reeled his head away, like something was in the way.

Every one of my friends continued flying away, but kept a close eye on the great dragon. Whatever force did that, I thanked whoever left it behind. Maybe Hiccup was right about those gods, the Aesir, helping us out every now and again.

The King gave us all hateful looks and then proceeded to draw closer, yet upon getting closer, the King was suddenly pushed back by an intense flash of light. Still angry, the great dragon then slammed his entire body at whatever mostly invisible force held him back, lightning burst from the ground, forming a wall of flashing light and searing electricity. The King might have had sheer physical power, but the wall held firm, pushing the great dragon back.

The King was forced to break off from his attack, his immense body burnt from the lightning, but not as badly as he was from when he went into my Dad's head. As soon as he stopped trying, to force himself through, the wall of lightning vanished, disappearing just right where the land of the King's island met the sea. Angered, the large dragon blew out a torrent of flame, one that could have turned entire blocks of my home village to cinders if only it could bypass the wall of electricity that held it back.

"Okay, Thor, if you're the one who's did this, thanks!" said my brother, a maddened look on his face.

"**I would not be praising the one who holds Mjolnir for this. He had no involvement, neither did that self-centered flirt whose vanity knows no bounds,"** said the King his voice still managing to be boom against my ear drums even though we were flying away. He then laughed, almost as though he was pleased. **"I must admit, I am mildly surprised the one who bound me to this place would leave behind a second layer of wards, one that I had never known about in all of these centuries. Weaker and far more fragile than my primary binds, but definitely an impediment to my immediate escape."**

I breathed a sigh of relief, as did most of my friends. The King wasn't going to kill us just yet.

"**But.**" The King then drew one of his massive paws and then drew it close to the invisible wall. Lightning surged again to block the paw and though the King did not cry out in agony, it was easy to tell he was being hurt. He bared his massive teeth and then he forced it through the wall of lightning, reaching just outside the wall. He pulled his fore arm back and instead of the wall disappearing entirely like it did before, the wall spent several extra seconds flashing erratically around the place where the King pushed his forearm through. And right at that exact spot, there was a hole in the wall of lightning, as if he somehow managed to leave lasting damage. My heart sunk, my fears once again were real. **"These bindings will not hold me forever, soon, I will truly be free."**

Then, as Stormfly took us further away from the King, he vanished behind the veil of fog that guarded the island.

"Okay, that was a close call," muttered Astrid.

"Uh, yeah, no kidding," agreed Hiccup, sounding equally relieved and distressed. "The King almost had us."

"He is no King," I said bitterly, only just barely able to contain the mess of emotions strangling my heart.

"Toothless?" Stormfly questioned, turning her head back at me.

"I refuse to acknowledge him as king, a lord, or anything of that sort," I half shouted. "From now on, we'll call him something else." As soon as I was able to think of anything but plans for how to rid the world of him.

I hated how he kept dragons and humans at each other's throats because of his own biases against humans, when he was capable of such great hypocrisy himself. I hated how he used my family and friend to enact this insane gambit, using all of us as nothing but cogs in his machines, only by wanting to reward us on his own term. But most of all, I hated that he took my Mom and Dad away from me.

No matter what it took, I was going to face _that dragon and slay it._

* * *

><p>With his feet dangling dangerously over the ever, Hiccup stared out into the distance, looking at the setting sun, his head likely full of thoughts about the day's events. I couldn't blame him, there wasâ€| so much that happened today. As I made my approach he turned his head to me and asked me a question. "Astrid, is this what it's like?" he said, then clarrified. "Losing, well, you know..."<p>

Though he didn't really explain what he actually refered to, it's not hard to figure it out. I should know, I lost an uncle once upon a time. I nodded and took a seat beside him, putting my feet over the edge. "It's terrible," I confirmed. "You're soâ€| overwhelmed that all you can do is just lash out or weep half the time."

Hiccup looked at me as if I said something unbelievable. "Youâ€| weep?"

"Only when no one could see me!" I sighed. I mean, really, I was like five at the time; of course that hit me hard. Pretty much the only thing I could do to keep myself from breaking up in public _was _plot out vengeance.

Hiccup nodded his head and turned back to the ocean, his face still dour. Thor, this was the worst I had ever seen him look, I mean, he didn't even return a joke! "Just when I finally thought everything was going perfectly fine, this happens. I guess that just goes to show me that I'm still nothing but a big screw up that only really ever seems to dig my entire family in a deeper ditch."

"That's not true!" I replied.

Hiccup threw his arms in the air. "My Mom and Dad are being held captive by the King and Toothlessâ€| well, you know what Toothless is doing."

"At least he's working through his emotions," I pointed out. Well, at least I hope he was. He did kind of lock himself to Gobber's workshop ever since we got back and who knows what kind of harebrained ploy that kid could come up with.

"I still could hear the explosions from here!" Hiccup shouted. And as if on cue, a small explosion hit our ears, barely audible, but definitely there. In the distance, right where Gobber's workshop was,

we could see clouds of smoke billowing out. "Who knows what he's doing in there!" Hiccup then put down his arms and then slumped his shoulders.

"Well, apparently, he does," I said. "But the real question isâ€¦ what are you going to do?"

Hiccup shrugged and then turned to the door behind us. "I don't know, that's why I'm here; I need to speak to Gothi." We were both stationed on the Village Elder, Gothi's frontâ€¦ lawn, dangling our legs over the edge. "I knocked on her door and told her I needed her advice, but she still hasn't come out.

"That's good then," I nodded. At least my boy friend at least had some idea of what to do, but I think I needed to expand his options a little. So, I handed him a familiar black book, one that he hasn't opened in the past few months. "But, how about this?"

Hiccup's eyes flashed with the spark of inspiration, ideas coming clearly coming to the forefront of his mind. He was definitely thinking of how he could use it. "Well, I'll need the Latin book too, but what about it?"

I flipped open the page to the one item that start this, the potion that originally made Hiccup turn into a Night Fury and made this mess. "I know that the King said that eventually the spell he gave you will no longer workâ€¦"

Hiccup sighed. "Don't remind me; I'm not looking forward to being a Night Fury."

I continued, "But maybe you can use this."

"How?"

I shrugged. "It's clear we can't fight him the way we do other dragons, but maybe we'd have better odds if we had more dragons backing us up."

Hiccup looked at me as if I was the one who had the crazy ideas. Come to think of it, the idea was kind of crazy in of itself. I mean, dragons were fire proof right? What good did turning into a dragon offer against another dragon that was bigger than you?

Then, the door to Gothi's house opened. Hiccup and I climbed to our feet as the small statured elder approached usâ€¦ with a scroll of parchment in hand.

Hiccup and I then quickly gave her a short, polite bow. "Gothi, I want to know, what should I do this situation? My Mom and Dad areâ€¦ well, held captive and that's just the tip of the ice berg! I don't know what to do here!"

The elder nodded and then handed Hiccup the parchment in her arms.

Hiccup's expression suddenly turned sullen and glancing at the paper, I could tell why. At the top of the parchment were these words, forming perhaps the strangest title I had ever seen, _"A Message by 'Old Wrinkly' to His Grandsons. Yes, Both of Them.'"_

* * *

><p>Some of you probably already have your guesses over what's happening next, some of you will be proven right, some of you disproven wrong. You'll have to see next chapter.

30. Chapter 30

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Finally, I got this chapter out. Boy, I hope you guys enjoy this. We'll have answers to some of your questions, more questions. And then, to top it all off, we'll be moving on to the next phase of the story.****

****Read, Enjoy, Review.****

****See you.****

* * *

><p>Fire raged behind me, the scalding flames of the furnace carrying only a small fraction of the anger that burned in my heart. The hammer in my hand might have been heavy, but the weight put on my chest was far greater. I broke, hammered, chiseled, and scribbled away at metal, wood, and parchment, all to suit a purpose a mad plan of my own making. And I was mad in every conceivable way.<p>

The King betrayed us. He had deceived my father and imprisoned him despite doing everything he asked for. My mother may have served him loyally as the highest of servants for over a decade, and yet he still gave her cruel and unfair ultimatums that only ended up hurting us. My brother was used to further his designs and doing so doomed our parents. Now, Mom and Dad were gone, stuck on that creature's island against their will because of my former Lord's whims and hatred of humans.

I used to believe in his every word, his every doctrine, that humans, that the Herd, were monsters and beasts. Now that I know better, I know just how full of hypocrisy he was. And now that I know better, there's really only one thing that can be done to monsters.

I took a look at the scroll of parchment on the work table again. My designs had to be perfect, my weapon had to be without flaw or blemish. One wrong move, one wrong misstep in the planning stage and I would have to start my project all over again from scratch. It was delicate work, but there was some promise. My father was the greatest man I knew and the King could easily crush him like a gnat if he so wanted. Therefore, I had to design a weapon that would let me face the King in a different way.

"Toothless, it's getting late."

Startled by the sudden announcement, my legs automatically went into a run. The problem was there was a table in the way. My waist ran into the table's edge and I ended up knocking myself down. Then, to make matters worse, since I shook the table, I ended up dropping

several of my writing supplies onto my face. A stack of parchment and pen alike fell on upon me, surprisingly painful for objects that a normally so much lighter. Uneasy laughter filled the room, a familiar noise that made me feel suddenly self conscious about my own stupidity. "Stormfly," I groaned, pushing away the things that obscured my vision. "What are you doing here?"

The girl giggled at my silly predicament and helped remove the junk that fell ontop of me. "Getting you something to eat. You skipped dinner and everything!" Stormfly then hefted a basket into view and pulled out a loaf of bread.

I glowered at the girl and pushed the food away. I picked myself up and hastily began returning my fallen tools to the table. "I'm not hungry." That plus the last few time I had been given any food while on the job, well, that wasn't exactly an experience I'd like to relive.

Stormfly rolled her eyes, as if she knew exactly what was going through my head at the time. "Hey, I'm better at this than Astrid!" She slammed her food basket on the worktable, causing it to shake. It was only the rapid intervention of my quick reflexes that kept the tools from falling yet again.

I glowered at her, upset that she could be so stubborn. I pushed the food off to the corner, not wanting to even take a peak. "I've got work to do."

"And you can afford to that work tomorrow." She pointed off at the outside of the forge, out into the darkness that surrounded us. "The sun's been down for at least two hours now, so eat up." She then pushed the food over to my pile of tools and writing equipment.

I rolled my eyes, why did she always have to be so difficult? I responded by pushing the food basket back again. I have thought of Stormfly as well, someone important, but that didn't mean she could be so insistent. "Stormfly, I like you but—" Stormfly froze at my words, her face beaming red like heated iron. Just, what exactly did I say. "Uh, is something wrong?"

Stormfly slapped her self in the forehead. "Uh, just nothing, you were saying?"

I nodded my head slowly, still weirded out, but I continued, a little more wary about what I wanted to say. "Look I'm just—"

"Upset," she supplied for me, taking the word right out of my mouth.

I nodded. "Mom and Dad are gone and I did was just run away and leave them to rot." I shook my head and laughed at just how pitiful I might have been. I was the kid of two of the greatest warriors of my Tribe and I turned out to be such a weakling who runs away.

Stormfly grabbed onto my hand, reaffirming me with her simple presence. "I know it must been hard on you to just leave them there but Toothless, there was nothing you or any of us could have done back there; you couldn't have beaten the King!"

I turned my eyes down to my plan for my weapon, my design to change

my own ineptitude. "I know," I said so bitterly that I almost felt my lips pucker up. "But that's not going to stop me from trying next time."

Stormfly shook her head and deposited her basket of food on top of my parchment. "And there wouldn't be a next time if you let yourself starve to death!"

I rolled my eyes and moved the food yet again. Boy, this was starting to get tedious. "I'm perfectly fine!" I replied.

"Are you?" Stormfly cocked her head like she was an owl.

Actually, I was starting to realize I skipped lunch and dinner now that my attention had been turned to it, but right now I just wanted to have a minor victory today, any victory even one so pointless and miniscule as this. "Yes, I am!"

Stormfly glared at me like she knew I was lying. "And Astrid says I'm a bad liar."

"Well, you are!" I responded.

She rolled her eyes and again lifted the basket over to me. Now, unlike last time, she also kept her hand near the basket's grip with the very clear intent to make sure it didn't move away from me again. I silently cursed, knowing there was no way I could overpower her to push it away from me again. "Well, this isn't a lie, either you take your bread or I'll feed it to you."

I threw up my hands in the air. "Fine, Stormfly, you win, you win." I then absentmindedly broke off a piece of bread and put it in my mouth. It was sweet and soft, definately better than the last time Astrid gave me home cooked bread.

"Good, you can be trained." The girl then flashed me a smile, slightly making defeat sting a little less.

I frowned at her, not wanting to let her have all the satisfaction. I turned to my plans once again, thinking of ways I could improve it and how practical it would actually be. On the other hand, since this was more or less meant for facing an enemy the size of a mountain, there was very little need to worry about overdoing the sheer lethality.

Stormfly got curious and pointed to the drawing. "So, what's that?"

"The weapon I plan to kill the Red Death with." The King was no longer a King in my eyes nor was he fit to be mine. That all made him sound far more regal than he actually was. No, he was a beast, a monster, and as such I was going to from now on going to address it as such.

Stormfly nodded, understanding without a word.

"He-"

"It."

Stormfly kept going. "He is no longer my lord nor my master. The

others will likely say the same. What he has done to you was unfair and cruel."

That I approved wholeheartedly. The Red Death was my enemy and my friends, both human and dragon alike, have all decided to take my side in this; that almost made all of the heartache from today bearable, almost. "And together we will take him down."

"Or die trying. Either way, it'll be something for the future to remember." Stormfly and I turned over to the new comer. Meatlug walked into the room.

"Meatlug, what are you doing here?" asked Stormfly.

"Seeing Toothless," the larger girl replied. "Hiccup wants us over to the Kill Ring ASAP; he says got something he wants to show us."

"In a minute, I've got to shut down the furnace." I said, feeling unsure about meeting my brother at a time like this. I mean, it was partly his fault that Mom and Dad were held captive, but then again, the Red Death did deceive him on so many levels. On the other hand, if this was important, maybe it was another weapon we could turn to use against our former ruler.

"Alright, just don't take too long. He says it's that important and I've got to be there when he writes it all down!" Meatlug then walked out and departed into the night.

I scarfed down a loaf of bread and then began packing up my tools and equipment for later use. Gobber might not have been here, but the man did drill it into my head to at least return everything to its proper place for later. I shut down the furnace and buried the burning wood under a pile of ash, choking out the blaze. Gobber was probably still out doing what he called 'damage control' and there was no point to leaving the furnace on when it wasn't in use.

Lastly, I turned to the scroll of parchment that held my secret weapon. The weapon might have been simple and technically easy to remember, but I did have a couple of extra notes about making the thing even more effective than what it originally was. Stormfly picked it up before I had the chance.

"Give it back," I demanded.

"Not just yet; I've got something you show you."

I rolled my eyes. "Show me."

Stormfly handed me the basket and pulled out something from it that wasn't bread or at all edible. A familiar, black cloak made of cloth that was so finely woven it almost resembled scale. Several parts of it were burned, but even then it still hummed with faint thrum of power, the power to change an ordinary boy's form into something else.

I blinked at the article of clothing as Stormfly put it in my hands, suddenly realizing just why she gave it to me. It was the only thing I had from a grandfather I had only ever known in my dreams. I had only had the chance to wear it once before it lost much of its power, but in that one time, I felt near invincible. Donning that seemingly

simple effigy of a Night Fury was enough to return me to dragon form, with all of its strengths and abilities, from explosive fireballs, to flight, to simple things like not getting cold in freezing waters. Strength and ability enough maybe to slay another great and seemingly invincible dragon.

I turned back to Stormfly, wondering what was going through her head. "Our Old Teacher used to instruct us to rely on more than just a single weapon or defense. Maybe your weapon does fell the Red Death, maybe it doesn't. Doesn't hurt to have a back up plan."

I nodded, liking her foresight. "Well, it's currently broken, but maybe I can get it fixed in time." All I needed was someone to sew in the replacement fabric and somehow figure out how the cloak actually worked. If it was based on a similar principle as the runic magic my brother and I learned of, then we were golden.

Stormfly smiled at that. "Well, if you can, I'd look forward to seeing you as a dragon again." She then stepped away and headed out the door.

Dimly, I just suddenly realized that that was the first time Stormfly approved of me as being a dragon, ever. I mean, sure, Stormfly and I have been getting along quite well ever since, well, we imprisoned her on Berk, but I never expected that that'd mean that she's one day approve of my being a dragon. Odin, how much have things changed?

I stuffed my cloak back in the bread basket and took it with me. It was better to keep it safe along side me, so I could study it later. Maybe I wasn't really a dragon, but that didn't mean I couldn't pretend to be one, did it? And it wasn't like I had to give up being human either. The main reason I never took the time to brew up and drink the potion that would eventually end up turning me into a dragon was a one way trip. But transformation by the cloak was different; I could change my form in the amount of time it took me to decide I wanted to drop my hood. I wouldn't need give up being human; I could be either a dragon or a boy whenever it suited me, literally.

* * *

><p>I scanned through the parchment again and again, trying to grasp its contents all at once. The note my grandfather wrote for me might have been written in the most clear and concise handwriting I had ever seen, yet no matter how hard I tried, I found it so difficult to grasp. It was in simple Norse, the kind even a lay person should understand, yet for the life of me, I was stuck dumb reading the message.<p>

Even without getting into the actual contents, the letter kept bringing up more questions than it did answers. Outright, my grandfather already mentions he knows about the fact I had a little brother on the introduction and it only gets 'better' from there. The parchment was quite old and a small date was scrawled on a corner, setting the original time of writing about ten years ago. A different date was under that one, denoting today's date. Already I was left wondering why Old Wrinkly knew about Toothless and why Gothi had this letter for ten years and never bothered showing it to me earlier!

Maybe, it would have helped if Gothi bothered explaining things for me since she clearly knew something I didn't, but then again, maybe it would have helped more if I had some peace and quiet.

"Are we going to tell us what we're here for or what?" Complained my cousin at the other side of the room. Snotlout sat at the table, his head leaning against Hookfang's side. The large Nightmare rolled his eyes, probably finally starting to get agitated at his so-called liege.

"We're still waiting for the others," I supplied, putting away the piece of parchment.

Snotlout glowered. "But come on, mind telling us what's so important?"

"Yeah! If it's gotta do with that scroll of yours, it better be bloody!" Ruffnut chimed in.

"Because we're taking time off telling the story about how your..." Tuffnut added.

Astrid cracked her knuckles in a disturbing fashion, thankfully intervening at the right time. "What story?"

Tuffnut and Ruffnut both cringed and squirmed in their seats, oddly enough not wanting to face an upset blonde girl. "Uh, nothingâ€¦" both said monotone. They slumped their heads back and fell beside Barf and Belch's scaly hide.

"Thank you, Astrid." Fishlegs announced, breaking his silence while simultaneously still managing to sort through a variety of notes he brought along for the occasion. He was the only one other than me who knew the contents of the letter and as a result, he came prepared.

I was glad at least for now someone was able to reel those two in, at least for a little while.. The twins and their loose lips practically told everyone the full story about how my Dad ended up being a captive. Sure, most people didn't believe the part about, Dad being held captive by a massive all powerful sorcerer dragon that's forcing him to change against his will, but they did believe the part about him getting captured by a very big dragon. I guess it was because no one else was still willing to accept that dragons had access powerful magical abilities. Still, I'm surprised there's no riots. I guess Gobber's working overtime to keep order was that effective.

Thankfully, before a riot of my own broke out on my hand three newcomers arrived in time. Stormfly, Meatlug, and my little brother all came walking in the front gate, all of them quite a little surprised to be setting foot here.

"I wouldâ€¦ prefer not to be in this place," complained Stormfly.

"It's wasn't my first choice for a meeting place," I replied. I glanced at the Nightmare and the Zippleback, wordlessly making my point. Both had lost their talismans during our escape from the King and as a result were stuck in dragon form until my brother and I could make some replacements. That pretty much made our choice of

meeting places quite minimal.

Stormfly frowned at the two, technically three, of them, as if somehow she expected this would happen. Barf, Belch, and Hookfang responded with frowns of their own "I told you not to leave them on the ship, I really did." She took a seat beside Astrid, thankfully not getting in between me and my girlfriend.

"We can discuss that stuff latter, right now, I think there's more important things to do," chirped Meatlug before turning to Fishlegs. "Got another pen?" She took her seat beside her own boyfriend and taking several scraps of paper for herself. Never would have I guessed that she would ever take up writing, but I guess that's just Fishlegs's influence over her.

Toothless set what looked like a breadbasket near his side of the table as he took his seat.. His gaze seemed quite intent from looking away at me, no doubt the result of today's waking nightmare. I didn't blame him for taking that leap of logic, a small part of me blame myself for what happened as well. "So why are we here?" he said, not turning to face me.

Everyone else's eyes turned on me, especially Snotlout.

I took a deep breath and tried to keep myself from cracking under the stress. Today in particular was pretty rough and I wagered that having everyone of my friends' attention on me was not going to make my life any easier.

I unfurled the piece of parchment and put it on a table, placing another piece ontop of it, just to make sure everyone was on the same page. The message wasn't particularly long and each sentence had enough weight to shake someone's idea of the world to its core, just like it did mine.

Everyone did as I expected them to and got up to read the message, even Astrid, since I never shown her the full contents of my message.

"'A Message by 'Old Wrinkly' to His Grandsons. Yes, Both of Them,'" Toothless repeated the first line of the message, his eyebrows cocked in very clear confusion. The only time he ever met our grandfather was in a dream that we both shared several months ago and even then, that was just me reliving a past experience. Now, this was the first time our grandfather was acknowledging he existed.

"And he very clearly means you, bud," I moved down the paper and allowed the other to read a little further and I read allowed the next part. "'Now Hiccup, if you don't know this yet, you have a little brother. As far as I am aware, he doesn't have a name yet, but that's because your Mom is quite a stubborn traditionalist. And yes, your Mom's alive, well at least at time of writing, but that's not the point. I just hope when you two meet each other, you don't even up shooting each other out of the sky...'"

Everyone looked at me like I was even more than a freakshow than I usually was. I mean, sure, most everyone knew Old Wrinkly had a reputation for being a Soothsayer, more specifically, a bad one. I mean, it was kinda well known before he disappeared that his predictions weren't always quite right and always fudged the details,

but the fact he was able to list all of those details about my brother so accurately and nonchalantly pretty much set the standard for how weird things were going to be this night.

"Your granddad had quite the sense of humor." Astrid shook her head, elbowing me.

Toothless looked unsure of what to think. Pretty much the same way I left an hour ago when I read the message by myself. "Okay, it is creepy. Where did he even get this stuff? And why is bringing it up now."

"Because apparently crazy runs in both side of our family, take a look for yourself." I showed everyone a little more of the parchment.

You're probably full of questions, questions that you really shouldn't need to be asking. Such as why I bothered to write this letter several years ago and why you're finally now getting it. Why I know you have a brother. Well, right now, you're about four, and quite a bit of what I have to say is stuff you aren't completely ready for, nor do I think you'll ever be ready. If my other grandson is also reading this message, you're probably wonder how I even know about you. Hopefully, this message arrives to you both while you're in your teenage years when it could do the most good, but when predicting the future, some things aren't exactly easy to take advantage of.

Fishlegs took a small break from his note taking and note grabbing to make a comment. "Well, there goes that theory that he wasn't really a Soothsayer."

But because you're getting this letter, it means that the appointed time I have set for Gothi has come at last. And because of that, I think it is fair I let you in on a little secret, because once you know this, everything else will make start to make senseâ€¦|

"'I am a Night Fury...'" Toothless gasped aloud, sending everyone into the room in a silent daze. Sure, one of the odd theories Fishlegs and I thought up to explain why all the Night Furies in the Archipelago were all in a single family posited that my grandfather was also a Night Fury, but confirming it was outright confirming it was still like getting a sledgehammer in the face. The only reason I wasn't phased was because I already had that information beat into my gut.

I continued where my brother off, hoping to get everyone back to reality. "' I have lived a double life, one foot in two separate and opposed worlds. In one night, I am a simply village Soothsayer and doctor, a wise man who though easily belittled is doubtlessly essential. In the next, I serve under a King, a great dragon of an age long gone, leading his Flights in ransacking villages for over forty years, even our own. If you ever learn about how dragon civilization works, you'll know that I speak of is the truth. Let me just say that I never actually got things sorted out and that my two lives have an incredibly complicated relationship.'"

Meatlug spoke up, stopping her scribbling. "There were stories about a predecessor before De, uh, Val ascended to the rank of Flight Commander, an aged old Night Fury, but not much is sung about

him."

I nodded my head. Suddenly, the fact that Old Wrinkly disappeared at around the same time Mom decided to start working for the King no longer seemed coincidental. Did the King go out of his way to remove him? And why didn't Mom bring him up? Was thereâ€¦ something else going on? I wouldn't put it past the King to try something like that.

Toothless it seems had also come to the same conclusion I did. Despite the fact he was still quite confused about everything, he slammed his fist into the table, almost sending the parchment flying. Still, he remained silent as Stormfly interjected. "Why is everyone in your family a Night Fury?"

"Good question, Old Wrinkly provides some light on it." I showed them more of the parchment yet again.

Toothless deciding he wanted to vent decided to read, though his tone made it sound like he was growling. "'Your mother and brother are in much the same situation I myself was in, but unlike myself, they are bound to as they are now; hopefully, you never have to experience that situation. Just as well, I pray that your mother never has to do what I've done, but I know it's unavoidable as long as my Lord holds dominion over thousands of dragonsâ€¦' and I am caught between two different worldsâ€¦'" My brother became silent for a moment, clearly thinking about that last part.

I too just noticed that something wasâ€¦ odd about it, something that wasn't clear to me in my initial reading. Old Wrinkly as far as I knew had a presence on Berk, but apparently also spent plenty of time working for the King. Unlike Mom, he must have some way to switch between forms, probably easily. Maybe it was a reference to a single article of clothing he decided to loan my brother and me as an heirloom. That'd certainly explain why he had it in the first place.

Toothless continued. "I know that maybe plenty of what I have to said to you might be coming a little too late for comfort, but even I am not that overly prepared. I'm still debating on whether or not I should tell you everything else For all I know, you could have already had a family reunion by the time this message is received. The best I can do is set an exact date for this message to be delivered.' Why bother with an exact date in the first place if the future is so chaotic!?"

"I told you, crazy runs on both sides of the family!" I shook my head and then went to read further, this is "'There are however two things, I know that I need to explain first and foremost. The first being our family'sâ€¦ unique gift. Now, I know turning into a dragon might beâ€¦ odd, but hey, Thor didn't like his hammer either when he first got it. Though admittedly, there is something else comparable on your father's side, but that's not something I am qualified to speak of.'"

Snotlout rolled his eyes. "Well, duh, we've got strong warriors in our line! Barring two exceptionsâ€¦ Hey-Ow!" For his trouble, Astrid and Stormfly both stomped on his feet.

I laughed a little, but at the same time, I couldn't help but feel

Snotlout might have been right on one thing. Wasn't it a little strange that Snotlout aswell had his own access to magic? That went along with my Dad's apparent near immunity to Alvin's curse and the crafting abilities my brother and I honed. There was something going on on that side, for sure.

Toothless carried on for me, "I think this is perhaps the most important thing I could tell you, but now you probably ended up turning into a Night Fury at some point in your life. You also might have learned your brother was pretty much born as one. Well, I'm here to tell you that this isn't all that unusually for our bloodline. It's quite normal for us, really, like how some families have red hair." Toothless and I both finally exchanged glances, breaking off our decision not to look each other in the eye. That was the first time anyone I had said becoming a Night Fury, or any dragon for that matter was 'normal'.

I continued reading out loud. 'I don't know the original story, beyond what my own father told me, but apparently, there is a spell on our bloodline, one that mandates that eventually, members of our family end up transforming into Night Furies, though the exact mechanics vary. Now, I thought I could let your Mom never have to deal with this sort of thing, but, well, I was wrong.' Yeah, that makes as much as sense to me as it does you guys." I am oddly enough disappointed about learning this. I thought that turning myself into a dragon made me the black sheep, but apparently, this kind of thing was expected. Odin, what kind of world did I live in?

Toothless frowned. "Well, at least we know it works the other way around. 'And secondly, I have spoken to you about a King, a great and mighty dragon that looks like he could topple mountains by himself. You're probably thinking he's related to Nã-Ã°hÃ¶ggr or is one of Loki's kids, well, I'm here to tell you he's not. In fact, he's not Norse at all.' Wait, but I thought you kept saying that the Red Death" -Toothless was insistent about calling the King by his new name- "was Norse?"

"Apparently not." Now that we were nearing the end, I revealed the last bit of the parchment, exposing the rest of the letter for all to read. "'He hails from a far off land and a long dead civilization, one that even I knew the name of, you wouldn't know what to do with it. Long ago, he journeyed to the Barbaric Archipelago when the Romans were still expanding and fortifying their nearest neighbors..."

"So that definitely explains why he knows about the Romans!" Fishlegs pulled out a piece of parchment detailing another one of his theories, the one involving the founders of Rome being raised by wolves. Apparently, he figured out that that's who the King referred to when he said 'Sons of the Wolf'.

I nodded and then continued. "'And in coming here, the King ended up being bound to where he is now, chained to the island and awaiting for his day of release, much like Fenrir awaiting for his. I don't know how he ended up caged on the island or even the full extent of his, but I do know this; if he is ever freed, the King will seek to make war on humankind and I don't mean simply stealing food.'"

Toothless and all of the other dragons cringed, probably a little

guilty about the way things are set up. I mean, they kinda did used to be working for the great big dragon and that made the conversation awkward when their past employment was brought up. The fact that this was all eventually going to lead to a war didn't help matters either.

I continued again. "'I am not going to lie to you, no matter how tempting it may be, but if the King has under any circumstances been released, then there's nothing I can do other than give you this advice. I know that one day, either you or your brother will fight him.'"

"Good!" Toothless slammed his arm into the table. "I want to take him down!"

"Except Old Wrinkly isn't sure if we're going to survive or even win! 'I can't tell which of you is the one fated to face the King or even if either of you will survive or defeat him. All I know even after spending several days looking at the fire is that one of you will face him.'"

Toothless grunted, apparently liking his version better than the reality.

"'But regardless of what happens, I advise you both to not be fools. Don't fight the King one on one, not even if you have a death wish. I wish that of all the things I have seen, this would be one of the things that I don't.'" I turned to the rest of my friends, both those who were human and dragon alike. I knew what Toothless was going to say, but I needed to ask about the others no matter how guilty I felt about it. "Any of you planning to stand by us?"

I stared a little at my cousin, maybe a little more intensely than I shouldn't have. To my surprise, Hookfang nodded his head, which prompted Snotlout to declare, "Fine!" He raised up his hand in surrender.

"Well, we got nothing better to do!" Ruffnut declared.

"Yeah, facing off against the King sounded fun!"

Barf and Belch looked quite uncomfortable at what the twins said, but they also approved.

"Stormfly, you still have my back?" asked Toothless.

Stormfly seemed to think about it for a moment, but then nodded her head. "Always."

Meatlug and Fishlegs both exchanged glances, approving each other's plans to support me.

Surprisingly, when I turned to Astrid she shook her head, refusing. "Wait, is something wrong, Astrid?"

"...I don't know." My girlfriend sounded unsure. Maybe it was because I was her boyfriend, but I would have thought she'd be the first to jump on to support me. "I don't think you should face the King!"

I shrugged. "And if I don't, the King will end up fighting us

anyways."

Astrid cringed, but eventually nodded her head. I wonder what's gotten into Astrid. Toothless also raised an eyebrow.

Shaking my head at that thought, I also made up my mind to do something else. There was no way a handful of teenagers were going to face a great dragon and win. Maybe I could get some support from Berk, but even I knew that might not have been enough. Fortunately, today an opportunity presented itself to get more friends.

I flipped the parchment that I had used to cover up my grandfather's letter, revealing these words:

In light of my ascension to the Chieftain, I am calling a Thing. So, next week.

New Great High Chieftain of the Berserker Tribe

Dagurâ€¦ still looking for a new title.

"I think we should go to this." The half of my friends that new Dagur raised an eyebrow at that. I mean, it's no secret to anyone except Dagur that I had loathed meeting his. But I was desperate and in need of allies.

"But Hiccup, what about what the King said?" Toothless question. "He said that eventually, the spell keeping you human will fade."

I nodded my head, already having factored that in to my decision making. Turning into a dragon right at a gathering of Tribes was probably going to beâ€¦ awkward, definitely. "Good thing you'll be tagging along, right, bud?"

Toothless turned slightly green. He knew enough about Dagur because I told him some tidbits about the boy. Needless to say, he wasn't thrilled about it. Still he saw my point and the purpose of why we were going and nodded his head. "Well, I guess Camicazi will want her things thereâ€¦"

"All the more reason to get going," I said I folded up the pieces of parchment and put them away. "Any one else have any questions before we get going?"

The rest of my friends all turned to each other, wordlessly trying to figure out if anyone had anything they wanted to say. Most of them didn't, but eventually Snotlout asked, "Yeah, who could imprison a dragon that size under a mountain?"

I don't know what surprised me more, the fact that Snotlout was the one askingâ€¦ or the fact he managed to make a very good question. Who had the power to bind a dragon the size of a mountain under a bigger mountain? A god might have, but something told me that was doubtful. And if that was the fact, how would a mortal get that kind of power?

Your Dragon franchise.**

Okay, so, I know it's been a while since I posted. I actually had a hard time coming up with all of the necessary elements for the story and I needed a breakâ€¦ it also happened at a time when I had my computer die on me.

Anyways, read, review and enjoy.

* * *

><p>I checked through my spyglass one last time, making sure the island in front of us was the right place. Islands at the distances we were working with tended to all look the same without checking carefully for any distinctive landmarks. Unfortunately for me, we weren't hopelessly lost. Right in front of us was Berzerker Island, home to probably the only person my age I thought was utterly insane.

Of all the people I did not want to see in the whole of the Barbaric Archipelago, way above even the infamous Madguts the Murderous or more relevant enemies like Alvin the Monstrous, Dagur had a special place in my heart. Sure, he was inviting me and my friends over to celebrate his ascension to the Chieftom, but I couldn't shake the feeling accepting Dagur's protection under the Code of Hospitality seemed about as safe as attempting to load a catapult with impromptu explosives and launching them while drunk and having it manned by the twins. I learned at a young age that Dagur's idea of playing with friends involved strapping me to a spinning wheel and throwing daggers while blindfolded. I really wish I didn't have to go visit him while he was hosting his Thing; but since Camicazi as well as any number of potential allies were going to be there, I really had no choice.

I sighed. This week just got better and better.

I put down my spyglass and overlooked the rest of my friends as they made final preparations to make themselves presentable; well, anyone who cared about hygiene was. The twins andâ€¦let's call them the other twins from now on...were off pestering the sailors that were controlling the ship, basically anything that did not involve a comb. Snotlout didn't need an excuse to go look at himself at a mirror and he had managed to convince Hookfang to help him out. Meatlug and Fishlegs were discussing something about nail files. Toothless and Stormfly were off busy on a corner, making the final adjustments for my little brother's ...demonstration. Astrid didn't need much maintenance to make herself look good, but I got the feeling she was overdoing it based on how long she kept doing and undoing her hair.

I made my own final preparations; I had pulled out a small hand mirror and did a little last minute grooming. Packing up supplies, gathering my friends and allies, and sailing to the island was the easy part, but getting off the boat and actually rallying support from the other Tribes was going to be problematic. Last I checked, I was one part laughing stock, one part overly cursed child, and one part runt of the litter with a hint of having my father taken from me. I was not exactly prime listening worthy material here. Plus, there was the fact that at any moment, the spell on me that kept me human could just fall apart and then it'll be open Hiccup season. If

I wanted to have even the slightest chance for success, I need to have every edge I could, even just looking my best could mean the difference between success and failure.

"You know, we could have justâ€¦ flown over, right?"

I turned at Astrid who asked the question and pointed at one of the reasons we didn't. Mildew sat in a corner, bossing over sailors and acting like an overly unpleasant Viking should despite the fact he was mostly skin and bones. "... And then we'd have to put up with him complaining about it."

"We could have just left him on Berk," Astrid pointed out. "You know he's only going to make things worse for us."

I shrugged, not liking it either. "And then we'd have to put up with him making the villagers at home panic." Of all the people that listened to the twin's telling of what happened that fateful day, Mildew was the one who picked up the story and _ran with it. _Ever since we came back, he's been spreading panic and using it to fuel his 'no-former-dragons' agenda. I'm really hoping if he ranted loudly enough maybe, just maybe I could come off as reasonable in comparison. Now, I know I'm not that well liked, but compared to Mildew, I hoped I would look sane in comparison.

Astrid frowned. "We still should have flown."

To which I stated the _other _reason we didn't. "And then everyone would aim their catapults at us." And even if he saw us, I doubted Dagur cared enough about me or my friends to let us land safely. Scratch that, he'd be going the targeting himself!

"Flying's still better," she quipped and then went off to finalize her appearanceâ€¦ for the fourth time.

I just shook my head as my girlfriend left me, not sure what's gotten into her lately. Then again, it was going to be our first formal occasion among the Tribes. That's sort of a big deal for her since Astrid was kinda going to be my girlfriend from now on. There was probably plenty of pressures on her to look her absolute best.

I shrugged. Maybe I should have take a page out of her book and taken no chances. Maybe wear armor so I can hide the fact I was basically a twig with two stick legs from the whole of Midgard. Toothless at least had something in store that was sure to woo over the crowds, I ended up with nothing.

It was not long before the ship docked into the crowded harbor. Unlike last time we were in Fort Sinister, the Berserker's harbor was jam packed full of ships of various makes and sailing under different banners. It wasn't like they had to resort to using other ships as makeshift piers or anything, but they were getting to that point. The sailors did their job without being told to, tying our ship to the nearest pier.

Behind us were a few more ships came, docking near us and putting out their one lines. Now, none of my friends were on board those ships, but Gobber to bring entourage just to seem more importantâ€¦ and just in case things got hairy or 'scaly'. I complied, hoping that these warriors would at least not make me seem any weaker than I already

was.

A few sailors were the first to disembark, making sure the ship was fastened to the pier and ensuring the boarding ramp was locked in place. They formed two lines, forming a small block of warriors, looking like a disciplined army to face the chaotic throne Vikings before them.

The crowds were disorganized, going back and forth for the most part. There were many of Tribes gathered here and one more was just not worth paying attention for some of them. Some them, the ones who felt like a Tribe like the Hooligans formed their own military formations to counter my own andâ€¦ I froze. At the the head of nearest formation stood a certain dark clad boy looking at my ship with glee. He stepped forward, his warriors marching behind him, a like rolling thunder onto the pier.

I felt hand touch my shoulders, jutting me back to reality. Toothless stood into view, giving me a pat on my shoulders and a firm look. "Well, you know them better than I do..." he murmured, but not looking like he was afraid.

I cringed. Dagur was not someone I wanted to go meet and greet, but on the other hand, _not doing that _was going to get me _killed _for not giving the Host proper respect. There were _stories _about people who failed to do just that. And besides, as much as I wanted to let my brother stand in front of me, since he was definitely the bravest of the two of us, that was only because he didn't know all that much about my so-called friend. I stepped off the boarding ramp, trying to look as dignified I can by only wearing a helmet and my usual attire.

In a flash, Dagur grabbed my by the shoulders andâ€¦ hugged me as if we were the best friends. Now, I've known the older boy all my life, but this was new. And it terrified more than anything else he ever did to me, even more than 'sharkwyrms fishing' we did when back for my sixth birthday. "Well if it isn't my _old friend Hiccup?" _he said with extra emphasis, making my skin crawl. He had this look in his eyes that reminded me of whenever he wanted to go do something that involved me getting maimed. "Didn't think you'd come to celebrate the day I crowned myself Great Hightain of the Berserker Tribe!"

"Oh well, I had I had nothing better to doâ€¦" I tried to sound nonchalant in my usual fashion. Besides, as I much as I was terrified of Dagur, I was being honest. I had to show up if I wanted to bring word about my father's recent capture. There was no way I was standing against the King alone. I didn't have that kind of bravery or power.

He laughed for a moment, before his face turned into a bored expression. He patted me on the shoulder lazily. "I would have thought your father would show up. Stoick and I have to sign a peace treaty in a few monthsâ€¦" Then a vicious grin crept onto his face. "Don't tell me, you got rid of him, did you?"

"Our father is alive!" I heard Toothless snarl. I turned just in time to see him step down the boarding plank, his feet stomping into the wood angrily. The only way he could have ever been madder is if Dagur referenced our Mom instead. "He's not coming, but we're here insteadâ€¦"

Dagur's face turned into a frown and he turned to me. "Who's this?" he asked, probably wondering if he could get away at putting a knife to my brother's throat.

I broke out of Dagur's grip and held tight to my brother. "Dagur this is Toothless, my little brother. Toothless, this is Dagur..." I hastily introduced each other, hoping they wouldn't come to blows. They didn't budge, but the two of them glared at each other for a dangerous split second.

Then Dagur broke the gaze and bellowed a laugh. "So, you really have a little brother?" the older boy gripped his stomach, obviously trying to hold it in, like he heard the funniest joke ever. "So your Dad really went off to a tavern and hired-" Dagur turned his back for a moment as if he was lazily imagining the scenario.

In that momentary lapse, Toothless went nearer to the other boy with a murderous look in his eyes. I kept him from going forward and making a scene. A month ago that would have flown completely over my little brother's head, but Mom kind of introduced him to the basics of that sort of business. just in time for Toothless to get angry about it. "No, we share both parents, just never met each other until recently," I said, hoping to hide Toothless's flaring temper.

Dagur laughed at that. "So you actually have a long, lost brother? Hah! Makes me wish I had one of my own!"

Toothless's anger held firm but thankfully his urge to attack Dagur was suppressed for now. "Easy, bud, just let him have his way for a bit," I whispered. I wasn't worried about my brother losing, no, I was more worried of how badly Dagur would end up. As much as I didn't like the guy, I did not want to see him reduced to a bloody smear for more reasons than just the pragmatic one that we needed him alive.

Toothless nodded. "He better not make a crack at our parents"

I confirmed with another nod of my own. Toothless was himself most of the time, especially since he finished his little side project; but the mere mention of our parents was often times a sore spot these days. Toothless tended to get quite defensive if anyone mocked either of them, especially Mom.

We left Dagur alone to finish his unsettling laughter undisturbed for a few more seconds. He wiped a tear from his eyes, letting the last of the laughter go. "So what's next? That rumor about you turning into a Night Fury turning out to be true? You wouldn't believe some of the things the sailors say about you!"

Well, that definitely explained things. Viking traveled quite a bit and though Berk wasn't a super major port, there were people moving in and out of the place every day. It was pretty much bound to happen that word about my transformation would spread off the island and reach the ears of people, probably even news about how the whole village ended up changing, eventually, to.. Now, granted, stories about me or anyone else turning into a dragon were probably so unbelievable only the crazy or the people who really know about that sort of thing happen would actually believe it. "Sure, it

totally happened," I said, being honest, but at the same time not. I figure, I might as well be honest now so that when I actually end up changing, he can't say I deceived him.

"Really?" Dagur looked at me thoughtfully. "Then why aren't you like, you know, a dragon?" Toothless looked at me like I had gone crazy. Which to be fair, I was way past the point of caring about.

"I turned back!" I smiled. It was just how hilariously unbelievable my life had become, like some sort of bad story a drunk might tell or Gobber for that matter... "I had to ask a gigantic dragon with incredible magical powers to give me the power to write!"

Dagur frowned, looking disappointed. "So, let me get this straight, you went and found a giant magical dragon all to give you a pen?" He laughed at first, but clearly lost his interest on the matter quite rapidly. He shook his head in disbelief. "What a hoot? And here I was hoping you were really a Night Fury!"

"Oh, but I am!" I said, not changing my tone. "My grandpa says I am!" The whole 'everyone-on-my -Mom's-side-of-the-family-is-Night-Fury' thing was pretty hard to swallow a week ago when reading my grandfather's letter. It didn't completely make sense, but that might have just been because I lacked the information to understand it. I mean, how does that sort of thing all start?

Dagur rolled his eyes and stepped backwards, clearly done with us. "Sure, sure, mine kept telling me I was a Skrill..." He then turned his back on us. "Just be Night Furies somewhere else! Especially not when we do the gathering at the Great Hall tonight!"

"Don't worry, I intend to!" I yelled back at the slowly leaving teenager, not a hint of sarcasm in my voice. Well, maybe a little.

Dagur scowled at me one last time. "It's happening soon, you know where to go." Then he took his men and left the pier. Meanwhile the warriors on my side of the pier went back to their assigned duties or went to join the random crowd of Vikings. A good chunk of them had a few knowing snickers barely contained on their faces.

Toothless eyed me for a second, clearly stunned at what I just did. "... Just what did you do?"

I grinned, knowing he probably wasn't going to understand. Now, my brother had good sarcasm skill, but he still had a long way to go before he was as good as me. "I just told him the truth."

Stormfly and Astrid came down the boarding plank after that encounter was just finished and over with. "And yet he thinks you're crazy because of it" muttered my girlfriend, her tone amused. It's always good to hear her praise.

Stormfly nodded in kind. "I am never going to understand how you can be so honest about something only for him to just disbelieve it."

I flashed the three of them with a smile. "To be fair, people already think I am crazy"

"Damn, right you are!" I heard coming from behind my friends. We all turned to look and found Mildew stepping off the boat, shoving the twins out of the way and into the waters of the harbor. Apparently the two of them were stuck bickering and in the way until Mildew decided he was tired of waiting for them. "You better not cause any trouble here _dragon-boy_," he said disdainfully.

I cringed awkwardly, replying. "Sure, no problem!"

"We'll see!" The old man snorted and walked right into the crowd. A swath of people parted to give him room to walk through without getting crushed by them; if there was any charm involved or it was simply the old man's sheer intense displeasure at me at work, I didn't know.

Astrid gave me a scowl. "You just know he's going to talk to the other Chiefs and set them against you right?"

"He's not going to do that!" I said, showing my teeth, so sure that he wasn't going to cause me any problems. At least, for a moment, I believed it. "Well, maybe not!" What were the odds like anyways?

Astrid rolled her eyes and muttered, "...Shoulda got rid of him!" Then she turned her attention back to the ship, alerting us that the others were beginning their disembarkation as well.

The rest of my friends moved off the ship with some polite chatter, the dragons disguised in human form. Snotlout and Hookfang both bore some fur cloaks, my cousin's idea to gather attention no doubt. Meanwhile, Fishlegs and Meatlug carried off the chest that contained some of the things that were important for us to bring. Barf and Belch hauled Tuffnut and Ruffnut up onto the pier, their clothes dripping with sea water. Any other people probably would have been upset, the twins though considered it an invitation for some general nastiness.

We all gave each other some polite banter about whether or not we should have done something to Mildew; I was losing. The twins and Snotlout in particular were coming up with some interesting pranks. The only person to support me was Fishlegs and even the peer pressure was getting to him.

And then just as we were about to leave the pier, we met an awfully small girl, almost Astrid's twin. She smiled and focused her gaze upon me and my brother. "Hello, boys."

Strange, how it was to be back where it all started.

* * *

><p>"Camicazi!" I barked out, eager to meet the girl. It's been a months since the last time we seen each other. After the whole...incident with Alvin, I was finally glad to see her again.<p>

"Toothless!" she cheered merrily, looking at me, then turning to my slightly older brother. "And Hiccup, good to see you boys are both here!"

Hiccup gave her an awkward look. "Well, Dagur invited us and all..."

The Bog Burglar girl gave a slight chuckle. "Right, woulda thought the Smash-em's or the Peacable would be hosting the first Thing of the year, but our resident maniac works just as well!" She then turned her gaze over to our friends behind us, especially Meatlug and Fishlegs since they carried the chest full of important things. She smiled upon seeing the dented treasure chest again. "I see you brought everyoneâ€¦ and hopefully everything."

Hiccup sighed, obviously not liking the idea. "It might be Dagur's special day and all, but we're ready to go speak to the Tribes about Alvinâ€¦"

I interjected, my tone bitter. "...and to kill the _Red Death."_ But as soon as it happened, I felt Stormfly's palm grab onto mine and then the anger left me for a single moment. Now wasn't the right place or time for it; I needed to save it all for a single moment, when I had an army at my back to face that monster.

Camicazi looked at me at moment confused, blinking her eyes. Then she got it. She looked up at the ship behind us and I saw the realization dawn on her. "Your father's not coming ain't he?"

"Mom's not eitherâ€¦" I muttered bitterly. Stormfly gripped into my hand. Hard. "Hey, ow!"

"Not now, Toothlesss," she said, looking into our eyes.

The Bog Burglar's face contorted for a brief, but very deep frown. "Gah! Well, this just keeps getting better and better doesn't it?" Camicazi snorted, shook her head and then turned to look at me. "...So, how's any woman, let alone a man, supposed to face that dragon?"

I turned to my brother and Stormfly, wondering if it was okay for me to talk about this one thing. It wasn't Mom or Dad, but I was sure it would bring them back to me. They just nodded their heads in approval, much to my pleasure. "I've got myself a secret weapon," I told the Bog Burglar, her eyes lighting up in wonder and idea. I couldn't resist the temptation to give her a little something to figure out, she was a friend and I figure she'd probably like the game of figuring it out.

"Ooh! What is it?" the Bog Burglar exclaimed, her eyes wild. She turned to my brother and asked, "You help you with that, Hiccup?"

Hiccup shrugged his shoulders. "A little, but mostly it all him."

She grinned in delight. "Well, whatever it is, I hope it knocks the trousers off those old men in the fort!"

"Oh, it'll do more than that," I assure her. I was planning to face a being my brother insists on relating to a god. I had a weapon that I was sure going to level the playing field and put me ahead. The _Red Death _was going to regret the day it wronged me.

I felt Stormfly's hands clamp on mine again. "Toothless..." she said in a scolding tone, returning me back from my own bitter thoughts.

"Sorryâ€¦"

Even Camicazi laughed a little. She pretended to go pay attention to her wrist for some reason even though it was bare and then turned to look up at us. "Alright, I think we've got 'bout an hour before Dagur calls on the other Chief's to gather in the fort. Shall we go then?"

Hiccup and I both nodded. The sooner we were through this mess the better.

Camicazi burst into a smile and then skipped, well, maybe even danced her way through the crowd of celebrating and feasting villagers. Everyone else followed her through the crowd, barely managing to get through the lines of people that made the pier an utterly congested mess. Fishlegs and Meatlug in particular had a hard time because of their cargo demanding even more room. The streets were crowded, but were slightly easier to navigate with Camicazi yelling at them, in between her telling my brother some things to note for the our meeting with the other Chiefs.

It was at this time of discussion during our trek, I noticed an odd trend. With the exception of Hookfang, my former peers, Stormfly, Barf, and Belch all lagged behind the group a little. Meatlug, too, kept Fishlegs from moving much farther, something weighed her down and it wasn't a chest composed out of heavy wood and metal.

I went back to them, since I wasn't so deeply involved in the conversation between the two _real _Heirs. "Uh, is something wrong, guys?" I asked, trying to sound maybe not too much concerned.

Barf and Belch both gave me blank looks. Stormfly cringed. Meatlug stopped moving for a second, almost sending the chest in her hands to the ground. It took them both a second, but eventually they all shook their heads and went to keep moving, as if nothing happened at all. "Uh, nope, nothing special going on hereâ€¦" blurted out the Gronckle-in-disguise, sounding painfullyâ€¦ obvious in her fib.

"Okay, even I know that's a lieâ€¦" I said to them. Something was on their minds and I needed to find out what.

"Nothing-" said Barf.

"-worries-" said Belch.

"us," they finished together.

"Then, why are you all seem, I don't know, disturbed?" I said. As I said that, I saw their eyeballs unsteadily move from side to side, as if expecting danger.

Stormfly gave a painful chuckle. "You're always so silly, Toothless," she said, her half-sad-half-laughing voice grating on my ears. This, didn't sound like the Stormfly I knew. "You're always thinking everything is so dangerous, I mean, you get scared when the lights go

out!"

"No, I don't!" I defended myself abruptly. I turned to look at the other others in front and no one, not even my own brother seemed to notice my little outburst, probably because of all the noise going on around us. I mean, the streets were pretty packed.

Stormfly laughed, this time sounding more genuine. Okay, maybe I was just imagining things, I mean, Stormfly took the opportunity to make a jab at me for the first time in weeks. "Nothing's wrong, Toothless! Just don't worry about it."

"Right!" I said, still not really believing her. Maybe I needed a second opinion. I turned to Fishlegs, wondering if his face could tell me what I wanted to know. "What do you think?"

Fishlegs's face did tell me he knew something was up. He cringed at the sight of my gaze, turning almost red as one of Mom's -Let's not go down that road yet- Like a berry pie. Beads of sweat fell from his face like little rivers on his face. He did know something. "I-Uh think!"

"Well!"

"Uh!" he stammered. The others all looked like they were dreading Fishlegs speaking about whatever it was, but they were clearly conflicted in intervening. Then something lit up in his eyes and with a look, he turned over to one of the nearby buildings.

I did so and saw what piqued his interest. It was a sign, more specifically, it was a sign about an advertisement, about an event. It had a picture that resembled a Viking warrior with an axe in one hand and a sword in the other. Beneath him were a pile of dragons, all under his massive boots like he was crushing a mountain. The dragons were dismembered and bloody in ways that I used to dream myself inflicting upon lesser creatures. The sign's words drove the point further home, reading:** "Sól's Day Sunday, Sol's Day Sunday! Come see REAL VIKING WARRIORS fight an army of VICIOUS, BLOODTHIRSTY DRAGONS! See BLOOD! See GORE! Contact your local representatives and get your tickets TODAY!"**

I backed up from the image and continued on my way, shaking it from my thoughts. My friends stayed with me for a moment, but once that little episode was over, we kept following my brother and Camicazi. "So wait, is that it's about?" I asked them at last. "You're worried about the...other Vikings?" I did not dare say they were dragons here, not unless some crazy found out and figured out their real origins.

Stormfly was the first to nod. She blushed, just as red as Fishlegs had a moment ago. "Yeah, sort of!" The others, including Fishlegs nodded in kind.

"Well, you should have told me!" I muttered aloud, not liking the fact that my friends of all people were not letting me in. I mean, we've all come a far way since we worked under that beast.

In hindsight, it kinda makes sense why they were all so hesitant. I mean, my friends were dragons and all, the enemies of Viking-kind everywhere except on a single island. If they were ever found out,

who knows what could have happened. They might have been sent to that stupid and evil event that was being sponsored by the Berserkers, where it is. I cringed at the thought, Stormfly almost got involved in an event like that, Hookfang, too, but he kinda broke his way out. I shook my self from those thoughts. No, that wasn't going to happen...Not if I had any say about it.

I turned back to Stormfly, patting the left pouch of my belt as if to make a point. She knew what made that so important and I let her know just how seriously I was willing to back up my words. "Look, I won't let anything happen to you. 'mI always going to have your back, just don't worry."

"Sorry" Stormfly said wistfully, her face no longer lit up with blood rushing to her cheeks. "But, I'm glad to know you'll have my back." It felt good to know my words can have that kind of effect on her. Though, that look of reassured sanctity vanished just as soon it had come, replaced by more worry was something else eating at her? "Well, maybe we can talk about it later, now's not really a good time..."

I nodded. "Right, well, okay" I said. Maybe it was just because we were in a street heavily crowded by Vikings.

At that, she walked off, doubling her pace until she was caught up with Astrid and listened into conversation ahead.

I turned to the others after she left me.

Barf and Belch both looked at each other, not as convinced and reassured as Stormfly was, but they nodded at me all the same.

"Talk to-" Belch started this time.

"-you-" added Barf.

"-later," they finished.

Then, they joined the group ahead, joining their two friends. Strangely, Tuffnut and Ruffnut were deeply involved the conversation, but really, their involvement was mostly limited them scheming up pranks to pull on the other Chiefs and Camicazi and Hiccup trying to tell them how they were all a bad idea. I didn't need to know much else to know they weren't listening.

Lastly, I looked at the pair that had been carrying the heavy chest through the village. Both of them smiled at me, nervously despite the fact I thought they had no reason to hide what made them so anxious about this place to begin with. "Uh guys?" I began again.

"Nothing's wrong!" Meatlug spouted.

"Yeah, absolutely nothing!" Fishlegs added.

They sounded so sure of themselves, it practically sounded like they weren't so sure of themselves, like they were trying to convince themselves of something. But that can't be right.

I shook my head and turned away from them. "Uh, sure, whatever." I

guess maybe once we were in private, I'll know what's been bugging them. It's clearly something.

The rest of the walk, I completed not speaking any further words beyond simple and automatic confirmation and denial. I listened in to the plan's Camicazi and Hiccup were going to bring when facing the Chiefs, mostly it being an order of what items were going to be presented and who were the biggest names to watch out for or who was likely going to back Hiccup in the upcoming matter. In other words, political stuff that I had no time or patience for. At least, not tonight.

We eventually made our way to the main body of the fortress, Fort Sinister, they called it. Apparently, it was made by those Romans Hiccup told me about some time ago, when they tried to colonize the Barbaric Archipelago. Strangely, the area didn't show so many people outside of it, but that might have been because the main part of the Thing, where all the Chieftains were supposed to gather together was probably still some time away.

We stepped through the main gate and I froze the moment I stepped through the threshold. It was like a cold and unsettling chill crept up my spine. I don't know what happened, but it stopped me in my tracks and made me fear to take the next step forward.

"Toothless?" I heard Stormfly say to me, concern in her voice. That jerked me back to reality. "Is something wrong?"

I blinked a little and found that the rest of the group had left us, leaving Stormfly and me behind, no one really noticing. I shook my head. "Yeah, it's just an odd chill." One that I had no idea how it happened to me.

"I dunno, you kinda froze for a second there..." she said, a little grin on her face. "Well, don't worry, I'll be right in front of you."

"Don't you mean 'have my back'?"

"Nope!" she then grabbed my arm and pulled me forward against my will so we could catch up with the others. I still felt that odd dread that kept me from moving forward, but Stormfly's energy was stronger than that odd feeling. Well, I guess if everyone else has odd and irrational fears about being on the island, I might as well have one of my own.

32. Chapter 32

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****A little late, but not as late as last time. I intended for this to be out on Christmas day, but I guess near end of the year is fine too.****

****This one I think will help set things up for the future.****

The first time I went to a party where Dagur was the guest of honor, I ended up playing a game of tag with him through the woods. It

sounds innocent enough, and it wasn't up until the point where crossbows, traps, and razor edged shields were involved. Needless to say, I learned how to run that day and from then on, I knew to dread any invitation the Berserker lands. I mean really, the only reason Dad ever let me get involved with him was because he thought I would have been a stabilizing influence on the guy. Yeah, about that.

Which is why I sat right next to Dagur with a perfectly contented smile plastered onto my face like nothing was wrong at all. I gave him everything from idle chitchat to plates of meat like he was a best friend who was just out of reach from the pickle jar which come to think of it, I just gave him. "Thanks!" he mumbled, his mouth full of bread and meat and now pickles.

If it wasn't for the fact I knew just how crazy my nightmares could get, I would have thought I was in one already. I mean, before the past few months, having dinner with the Dagur was near the top of my list. Especially in this room! So many of my worst experiences happened here.

The gathering of the Chiefs to sit at Dagur's table was his idea of a conversation starter, something to celebrate the first day of the Thing before they went and talked all about the politics. It was a little private affair where only Chiefs, Heirs, and anyone Dagur liked were allowed to be in, anyone else was a guard standing outside. He selected me to be on his right hand side, probably because he liked to torture me the most out of everyone else in the room or maybe he had finally gone sane and thought I was his, wait, no Hiccup, people turning into dragons might be doable, but Dagur was still going to be the only maniac who can compete with me.

I sighed and passed Dagur a loaf of bread and took a piece for myself before setting the basket down nearby. Now was not the time to have a break down. All I had to do was bring the issue of the goings on what was happening around the Archepelgio and I was sure Dagur would rally any Chiefs who were on his side to combat Alvin and the King.

I looked down at the table, taking a quick glance at those who I had to worry about. Even though the table set aside for the Chiefs and Heirs was about the size of an average sized longship, space was still a major concern; Toothless was the only other person allowed to sit beside me, and that was because he was my brother and because Dagur was really interested to get to know him. Dagur was actually quite interested in knowing about Toothless's story, though my brother wasn't as eager about bringing it up and just stuffed himself full of food. Thuggory was down the row next to me, followed by his father, both of them glancing at me and my brother like they were expecting something. Camicazi sat on the other side of the table, flanking Dagur's left along with her mother; only one of the Bog Burglars was pleased to face us.

Everyone else down the longship-sized table, I only had passing knowledge or very limited understanding of, but I was able to pick out some faces to who to look out for. Chief Slammaface didn't quite like me, Chief Mustard didn't like me either. And that's just the first few off the top of my head, another heir by the name of Wax'n Light'n never forgave me for borrowing his pickaxe... There were a dozen others men who could end up being a problem. Though to be fair,

I was kind of suggesting something a little insaneâ€¦ only a little. The things Camicazi told me earlier just made the whole thing even more difficult.

I turned back to Dagur, hoping the discussion would start soon.

Dagur devoured another drumstick in the usual Viking fashion and eyed me for a moment. "Hey, come on, eat!" He said, using the bone from said drumstick to point at my plate.

"Oh, uh, I was justâ€¦ wondering what I wanted to try out first. " I looked nervously at my plate, picking up a loaf of bread. I guess I had forgotten to eat with all my worrying taking away my hunger. Well, I guess I should eat before Dagur gets offended. I mean, maybe most Hosts probably would let that slide, but Dagur was not the nicest guy I , I needed my 'sometimes-friend' on my side if I wanted to get through this. It was Dagur's Thing and that meant quite alot.

"Well, you better eat up!" he shouted, slamming his fist into the table. "Once everyone's done we can really begin!"

I took note of that and decided that that maybe I was starving after all. I took a bite of my loaf and slowly began working on it. Toothless also paid attention to Dagur's demand and went through eating his food at a pace that was more his style a distant week ago. We both needed the discussion to start as soon as it could.

It was only a few minutes later when the chatter and sounds of eating died off. A few men burped their satisfaction while Dagur hoisted a mug of frothy drink to his side. He finished it and tossed the cup aside in a single gulp and slammed his fist into the table. "Alright, so let's begin. I figure we can all brag about our accomplishments from last year, just to start off my reign!"

Toothless, Camicazi, and I exchanged looks, silently communicating that this was perhaps the best time to get everyone to latch on to the topic we wanted to discuss.

Dagur flashed his teeth viciously. "Well, I don't need to tell you all about what I did to my dear old Dad! But I'd hardly call _that_ an achievement! He practically _agreed_ to let me rule!" A couple of men in the audience laughed at that. I didn't, mostly because I didn't know the circumstances for Dagur's succession.

"I beat two Nightmares!" one man shouted, holding up his hand. "Just by my lonesome!" It didn't sound unreasonable either. I mean, everyone here was either Chief or someone in line to be one. You didn't get to be that way without having some really noteworthy deeds to back your nameâ€¦ which come to think of it, maybe the reason my life has been so chaotic as of late is because Odin thinks I need more oddities to make for how utterly unimpressive I am.

"Well, I beat Shark-wryms while in the water!"

"I killed a Snaptrapper with one arm tied behind my back" said a cheif with only one arm. He probably finished the fight with his feet given he only had a peg leg.

Another of the Chiefs then began a saga no one else understood because it was in a weird language no one spoke. He was ignored, but kept going anyways, apparently enraptured by his own story.

And then another spoke about facing a horde of Whispering Deaths and came out on top. Toothless was kind of quick to dismiss it though, apparently because the Chief was making mention of the limbs the dragons had despite lacking them..

The contest of Chiefs trying to one-up each other was something I more or less expected. I mean, this was a gathering of most boisterous and proud Vikings in the neighborhood. Camicazi and Toothless glanced at me one last time, ready to spring our accomplishments. I mean really, it's kind of hard to top the sorts of things we all did in the past year.

"Alright!" I said, standing up. "I ended up getting captured by Alvin the Trecherous and then staged a jailbreak on Outcast Island and forced him to flee as pay back."

Everyone froze. I mean, it's one thing for a big strong man to defeat an enemy, but a stick figure of a boy like me ended up sounded like something ridiculous. And yet, they had to accept it as true because as part of this little incident, people who witnessed my plan in action were sent back to their home tribes, spreading the story further.

Dagur gave me a look of utter satisfaction, laughing. "Hah! Yeah, I heard about that!" he said, slapping himself on the knee. "I bet you made Alvin regret the day he crossed you!"

"And that's not all!" I said, turning to the crowd. Everyone.

"Then for pay back, Alvin came back a while later, wielding this!" I raised my hand and opened my palm up and Camicazi took the mis-shapen spear under the table and tossed it into my hands, just like we had intended in the first place.

The others in the room were about to draw their weapons and begin a fight. Others were about to grab the serving knives and plan to use them as weapons. But Dagur lifted up a hand and gestured them to stand down. "Wait, I want to hear this!" They did so, but only because Dagur as a compromise drew his sword and put it just behind my head. Smooth move Hiccup... "So, what's with this ugly spear?"

I cringed, nervous, but I held my tone. "This was Alvin's weapon when he ransacked Berk not too long ago and with it, he levied a curse among the people. I am sure you know about it..." I didn't have to say more before their eyes lit up in understanding. Most of the Chiefs heard the rumors, about men and turning into dragons. I just left out the part about me practicing a very strange art that turned myself into a dragon and the fact I was technically descended from dragons, but I had good reason to not bring that up.

"But that's just a spear!" shouted one man in disbelief. "It _can't_ turn people into dragons, of all things! That's just a fantasy!"

"Except it's not," muttered someone else in the room. Thuggory stood up and eyed me. "I saw Hiccup as a dragon not too long ago," he muttered. "He changed back somehow, butâ€¦ he was a dragon; I saw him with my own eyes!"

Everyone in the room was stunned. The other Chiefs and some of the stationary guards had their weapons or at the very least shields raised like I was a dragon that was about to lash out at them. Toothless was about to draw his secret weapon to take out half the table, but a quick glare was all it took for me to tell him it was a bad idea. Dagur was still able to calm them down, but that was only because in the split second it took for me to realize what happened, there was a sword right by my neck. "Wait, you were _serious _about that!?" he shouted. "I thought you were joking!"

Smiling nervously at the weapon, beads of sweat dripping down onto the sword's tip. Yeah, maybe it wasn't the smartest idea to pull the wool over his eyes. "I told you the truth! You just didn't believe me!" is what I would have said if I wanted to end my life right then and there. So what I said instead was something that not even Dagur could resist. "So, does that mean you don't want to go fighting the most dangerous dragons that ever lived?"

"Wait, what are talking about?" was his reply.

"Oh, nothing" I tried to say in the most nonchalant and indifferent tone I could manage, like I was trying to downplay the whole thing. "I was just wondering if you've ever thought about facing the most dangerous and powerful dragons in all of Midgard."

"And what does this have to do with anything?" He said, pushing his blade slightly closer to my neck.

I gave the boy an awkward grin, still trying to sound unthreatening. "What, did you think I was just bragging about some stupid things that happened a few months ago?" I threw up my hand into the air for extra emphasis. They were incredibly stupid. "No, what's really important is because of all that, I know where two of the most dangerous dragons in all of Midgard are! And I wanted to know, want to go hunting with me?"

Now I got Dagur where I wanted him. I saw it right in his eyes, he was having a mild day dream, probably imagining himself as a victorious hero fit for a legend or a saga. Come to think of it, I think everyone else had the same dream playing on their eyelids. "Wh-where are these dragons?" he said hastily, snapping himself out of it.

I took a glance at the sword.

Dagur didn't waste a second sheathing it and patting away the dust on my shoulder, giving me an awkward smile. He went back to his seat, an eager look on his face. The other Vikings did the same. "So, where are these dragons?"

And then I explained the first part of Camicazi's plan. First was taking care of someone who was decidedly not a god in human form. "Well, the first dragon used to be known as Alvin the Treacherous." No one stood up this time, I think I might have drained whatever uneasy reactions by my previous unsettling revelations. I didn't

waste any time and continued. "Alvin also ended up turning into a dragon and a dangerous one at that. Many of you probably heard that rumor too, well, it's true."

I heard mumbling in the background, several men talking to each other the rumor in case they forgot something. Claws the size of swords, muscles fast enough to catch arrows and strong enough to sheer swords, high invulnerability.

Camicazi stood up, now it was her turn. "We've been on his island and can tell you he's not as ugly as you think he is; nah, he's totally worse than that!"

Toothless was about to stand up and display the map he stole from Alvin, but I patted him on the side and kept him from standing. "Not just yet," I whispered, "too dangerous."

He nodded grudgingly, probably not understanding. It wasn't until Camicazi and I were at the table we both realized that now was probably not the time to bring it up; no, once Dagur and I got to have a private word, well, that'd be the right time for it.

I turned back to Dagur and then explained our plan for what to do to him. "Alvin's been causing problems for Vikings even before he changed. And now, he's the second strongest dragon I know, and he intends to use it to do whatever he wants! We have to deal with him before things get out of hand..."

"Maybeâ€|" Dagur said, casually tossing his sword in the air and catching it like it was a rubber ball. He was definitely considering it, but I wasn't sure of whether or not he was going to accept just. "But what about _the strongest dragon _you know?"

I sighed. Great, me and my big mouth making the whole thing even harder. Dagur was in this for the glory, and as a result, he only did what I wanted just because it meant a quick path to having a picture in every children's storybook about how great he was. I took a glance at Toothless, this was something he's been planning better.

My brother stood up and hoisted up his crossbow. "_That _dragon is know as the Red Death and-"

"And he is not the foe you should be fighting!" shouted another voice, interrupting my brother. He glared at the source. Mildew stepped in from the doorway. Guards barred his way but for a skinny old man, he was able to shove himself through.

"Wait, are you that Mildew, that old man that I used to set fire to his fields every year?" Dagur laughed, suddenly remembering the fun he had as a kid.

"Yesâ€|" muttered the old man.

"So, tell me why should I listen to you?" sighed Dagur, taking a sip of his mead as he was a little bored. "I mean, not unless you've got a fun idea to get myself in the history books!" Well, I guess that was one thing I had over Mildew, I appealed directly to Dagur's sense of glory.

"If you want to be a total failure!" spat the old man, pointing at me

and then my brothers. "It's because of these two that Chief Stoick is now being _corrupted _and _twisted. _Unless you want to end up like him, don't listen to thisâ€| _boy!_"

My brother growled at him. No, I mean he really growled. I guess despite being human and trying to avoid what he used to be for months, even he had some old instincts to fall back upon. Camicazi though was more active and threw a loaf of bread at him, hitting him squarely in the face.

"Camicazi!" her mother spat, upset. She probably blamed me for that. "Don't throw bread at people! It's not polite!" And then, to make a point she was about to reach for the knife, since it was apparently the proper thing to do.

Mildew raised his hand to deflect it and ducked just in time to avoid the hurled tablewear. "That's enough!" he spat. "This _Red Death _is not the most important foe!"

"Then who is?" Dagur said, casually tossing his knife in the air while trying to figure out where the best place to hit Mildew was.

The old man pointed to me. "This boy and everyone with him is a threat, one of them is even a spy for this dragon! If you want to face the Red Death, destroy them first!"

And that was all it took for everyone to drop what they were doing and focus squarely on the old man. There were murmurs of the Chiefs down the line, about them worrying that because I was a dragon before, did that mean that I was on _their side?_ Thuggory was even talking to Camicazi about my brother, wondering about his history.

Mildew continued, adding more fire to the confusion "Stoick might be a stubborn old fool, but even he will change and fight against us as winged demon when the time is right! The Red Death if given the chance would do the same to you!"

I wondered if maybe the couple of men down the table were maybe a little right about me being 'on the dragon's side'. I was a dragon once and I even received power and blessings from the King. What if the only reason I escaped was because I further some plan of his and by gathering together this army to face him, I was instead bringing all of his enemies into an easy to swallow gulp. Heck, these days, I'm practically telling everyone I meet that I was a dragon like it was going out of fashion!

And then there was that part about my Dad. I knew that the King was going to twist him into a dragon, but never occurred to me until now that in doing so, the King would do more than twist his body. I assumed he'd make him forget about being human, sure, but strangely, I never once thought that that meant he wouldâ€| Oh, that was not good, not good at allâ€|

I could only stare at Mildew, unable to think up a response. When I brought him along, I had hoped Mildew would sound like an insane lunatic and make me come off as reasonable and lightly saner in comparison. Instead, now he had me wondering about some things. "Kill them, kill them while you still have the chanceâ€|" said

Mildew.

Thankfully for me though, Dagur was not the kind of person who ended up thinking too much. "Gah, maybe later!" he then threw his knife and knocked off the old man's helmet without hurting him.

Mildew managed to barely catch it before it fell to the ground.

Dagur turned to the group, looking quite bored while everyone else had a solemn look on. "Anyone else think we're done with dinner?"

No one replied.

"Great, let's talk about killing dragons in the morning! Especially this Red Death! " he shouted, leaving the room with an excited look, like the one he had on him when he discovered how to create his own fires. "We've still got three days to go!"

And then the dinner ended, Dagur sounding like he had already finished making up his mind; we got Dagur on our side, just as we came for. We could save Mom and Dad. And yet, none of that made me feel any better.

* * *

><p>I should have been excited about the idea of facing the King again, to face him again for one final time and bring him down like the monster he was. He wronged me on so many different levels and in response I had gained what amounted to an army behind my back and built a weapon I just knew would have even the playing field.<p>

Hiccup and I were separated for most of our lives! Mom lived in guilt over her actions as a Flight Commander! He manipulated Dad into a taking a terrible bargain. Everything was his fault and he deserved to pay for it!

And yet, I was scared; all because of that rotten old man who really should have just been forced to stay back on Berk, mostly because he knew something he really shouldn't have. Mildew somehow knew what was happening to our Dad; the twins might have blabbed most of the story to the island, but they never spoke anything about what happened to the island. Their thing was explosions, chase scenes, and mayhem and even they knew that wasn't a bit of information worth sharing. How did Mildew know that? Did he listen in to our conversations?

And just as bad as that was the idea there was a spy in our midst. I was scared to think that one of my friends was planning on selling us out to that monster andâ€|worst of all, it's not unreasonable to imagine that at least one of them might long for the way things used to be.

For a time, I used to feel a longing for my old life as a Night Fury, or at the least parts of it. I liked being stronger and faster than most of my peers, having power directly in my mouth, flight; even now, I used to imagine how much better things would be if I had easy access to that. How much more would any of my friends be tempted? They had that, plus friends and family, still living under the Red Death's rule. All of my friends have very good reasons to

still be loyal to that creature. What if the only reason that any of them were still following us humans around was to keep an eye on us?

Which is why I was busying myself by spending time with them, because it was the only way to make sure.

"Alright, here we are." I spoke at last. Looking down to the village below; everything was quiet at this hour, for even Vikings got bored of a thing as too much feasting. The area from this altitude looked so familiar, but that's probably just because most Viking settlements tended to look so similar. The only thing different from Berk and the Meathead's village was that Fort Sinister, well, had a Fortress."So, what do you think?" I turned to ask my friends.

They all looked at me nervously, not even speaking a word, their eyes idly wandering at the large contraption beside us or gaze at the village below, both looks uncomfortable. If I was so far gone, I would have taken their silence an admission of guilt, but I did know better. Afterall, how many dragons get to stand in a siege tower and not get shot at? I mean, they were all jittery and it was because they were nervous about being in a place where no human has ever been, not because one of them was a spy, right?

"Look it's alright guys!" I said, trying to sound reassuring. "I checked in with some of the guards and so long as we don't mess up anything up here, there's no harm done!"

Barf and Belch were the first to snap out, their look changing from a sort of uneasiness to something a little more resembling mild curiosity, specifically towards the catapult bolted directly into the stone. "Is that what we-" started one fo the blondes.

"-think it is?" finished the other.

"Yeah, just don't get the twins up here! Hiccup will never let me hear the end of it if you do!" And stay loyal to them that is. I know that the two of them easily befriended the twins, but at the same time, they changed their side abruptly.

The two former Zippleback heads both whistled innocently and in the same tone and beat; I wonder if there was proof to the rumor that Zipplebacks could talk to each other with only a glance, because if it was true, well, I hoped they weren't planning on doing anything that'd get me kicked off the island or worse, they're pretending like they're planning on doing anything that'd get me kicked off the island.

"Oh-"

"-don't-"

"-_worry,"_ they finished at the time, sending minor chills up my spine. Oh, I hope they weren't the spy.

Meatlug was the next to break out of the daze. She walked over to the edge of the tower's platform and peered down, frowning.

I decided I'd rather not speak to Barf and Belch for a while longer, they were messing with me somehow, so I chose to go closer to the

large brunette girl. "So, what'd you think?"

Meatlug still frowned, her gaze focusing it on the houses and especially the walls. "These walls were made to resist fire," she said finally.

"Sure, they're made stone, stone isn't as flammable as wood." I pointed out. Why Berk or other Viking settlements choose to rely on wood for housing was beyond me. That stuff easily burns after a dragon's Breath, especially during a raid. Then again, why didn't they just make stone everything? The furniture would burn if the house wouldn't!

She nodded her head, strangely approving. "I guess it's no wonder dragons have tried and failed to bring down this place for many generationsâ€¦ Not two hundred years ago, not a hundred years ago, not now."

"Wait, what?" For some reason the statement grabbed my attention.

"Oh, nothingâ€¦" she said, turning her gaze back to the streets below.

I left her alone after that. I really hope that wasn't an observation about how she planned on bringing down the fortress. Sure, I know she was fascinated by human culture and knowledge, but at the same time, by knowing human things, the better we could be destroyed. She was a Gronckle after all, one of the most common dragon types ever. She had family _everywhere_.

I went over to Hookfang, observing the catapult alongside the twins.. "So, how's the tower?"

"Uh, great, just thinking about the last time I seen one of these things this close before," he said. He didn't really sound nervous about it, at least, not as nervous as the others, just awkward if anything. In fact, out of all of my friends, he was the one _least_ _concerned_ about being in this Fort, like whatever bothered the others about this place didn't apply to him.

"Wait, you've seen a catapult up close before?" This was news to me.

Hookfang nodded, so sure of himself. "Yeah, back during, a few months back during, well our first visit to Berk."

And then in clicked. "Oh, right, you wereâ€¦" I dropped the tone of my voice low volume, just so that others who were eavesdropping wouldn't hear. "You were captured the first time we went to Berk weren't you? What happened?"

"Flew too close to a catapult," he said, giving an sheepish grin. "Kinda saw the crew and then, well, they shot me."

"With a stone? Those things are big!"

He grinned even more awkwardly. "Well, yeah, they didn't miss. You can kinda figure out what happened after thatâ€¦"

I shrugged. "Well, I'll admit, surviving something like that is worth bragging aboutâ€¦"

"Maybe... " he said, turning back his back to look at the catapult. "But, let's not talk about this, not right now."

I nodded my head, out of reflex. "Uh, sure, later." Well, I didn't really know what'd motivate Hookfang into serving the King, mostly because I hardly knew the guy. Yeah, One Eye was his grandfather and might have encouraged us to play together when we were younger, but nothing ever came of it. Even now, I barely know him. But I think out of all of my friends, he was the least likely to betray us.

And then I turned to the one person I hoped in the whole of Midgard was not our traitor. Stormfly was off to the corner, on the other side of the catapult, her legs dangling over the edge, her gaze affixed skyward. I took a seat down near beside her, putting myself in much the same seating arrangement as her.

Before I could ask her a question first, she took notice of me and asked. "So, how'd it go?" She was talking about the meeting and about the plan to face the Red Death and Alvin.

I sighed. I didn't want to reallyâ€¦ explaining what was going on, at least not everything. I didn't want to withhold the information about there being a spy in our midst and that she was a suspect from my point of view. I really didn't. "Hiccup thinks Dagur's already made up his mind; we're going to face the Red Death in a few days," I was fine saying that stuff, but anything else was just asking for too much.

"And when we do, we'll have to face him, too won't we?" she replied.

"Yeah, you'll have to..." When she said 'we', she wasn't including me in that statement.

She nodded her head, as if to already make up her mind. "You already know where I stand."

"Completely." I wish that wasn't a lie. Part of me was still left wondering, where did the cruel and avaricious dragoness I knew for so long went? Stormfly before she became Stormfly was aiming to be one of the greatest Knights our Kin had ever known. Could all of this be an elaborate plot to deliver the Red Death's enemies into his hands. All it would take was a cunning enough stratagem and some time to win her Glory beyond measure.

And then, she did something. I felt a presence wrap around my hand, her's. I looked her in the eyes. "Toothless, I've beenâ€¦ thinkingâ€¦"

"Thinking?"

She nodded her head. "There's a very high likelihood of either of us not making it."

That practically killed the mood. In all of the time I thought of facing the Red Death, I was sure of my victory, but never once did I consider what it'd cost me. I mean, what if I died? What if Stormfly?

"Andâ€¦ what about that?"

She looked up at the sky once again, eyes away from me. "I'm justâ€¦ just-"

"Y-you don't have to fight the Kingâ€¦" I offered her. She might have been afraid to face her former master; I know I was.

For that I received a slap to the face, her face beaming red. "Toothless!"

I rubbed at my cheek. Was this what Hiccup left like everytime he said something wrong to Astrid? If it was, I don't understand my brother one bit. "What!? That way you'll be safe!"

Stormfly's face contorted into a frown. "It's not _that, _it's justâ€¦"

"Just what?"

She sighed. "Forget it, it's sillyâ€¦I'll see you later." And then she got up and left, climbing down the ladder down.

After she left, the others slowly left as well, one at a time, leaving me alone up there.

It was a strange feeling, realizing what I just did. I was afraid of having my friends abandoning me, of being found out to be on the enemy side earlier, yet without too much thought behind it, I was willing to let Stormfly sit the battle out. Oh what was wrong with me?

After an hour more, into the dead of night when the whole village seemed to lay sleeping, I finally decided that now was the best time to finally make it back to my brother's room. I knew the way, mostly because I took the time to unload my things there.

I crawled down the ladder and flew past several darkened corridors. Darkness didn't bother me as much as it used to, now that I spent a little time with it. It still creeped me out though and trudging through the mostly silent halls of Fort Sinister. It was cold enough to send shivers down my spine, but then again winter was still not too long ago.

Eventually, I made my way into what apparently used to be the dungeons, where my brother and I were lodged up. Apparently, this was his usual spot whenever he came over and Dagur say it fit for him to have. I approached the door and â€¦ heard an odd noise coming from behind me.

It sounded like the footsteps of a hundred men marching side by side, head footsteps trampling the stone. There was a voice, a man yelling but at this distance it was barely audible and not at all understandable. And then just like that the noise faded away into nothing.

It was strange becauseâ€¦ who would be up at this hour?

I shrugged. Maybe there were warriors outside doing night drills, Vikings did take warfare that seriously.

Then, dismissing that event, I enter the room. I could use the rest.

* * *

><p>So now I bet you're all probably wondering what kind of weapon Toothless has, one that he plans to kill the King with.</p></p>

And I bet you're all left wondering on who the spy is.

33. Chapter 33

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

This chapter came slightly later than I wanted it to, but I at least managed to get it out. Anyways, some slightly important things happen or are revealed in this chapter.

* * *

><p>I awoke, my eye blurry and weak, with not a light to guide my way. Dull pain wracked my body in various places and I was left with a daze, wondering what had transpired in the previous night.<p></p>

What happened? Where was I taken? How did I get captured? Where were the others?

But my senses slowly returned to me and I felt the metal against my neck, wrists, and my legs. I was in chains and held captive!

In a sudden outburst of anger and frustration, I struggled against my chains and wanted to yank them out of the walls from their sockets. I did not want to accept being held captive! I was to be free!

Instead all I accomplished was making noise and straining the my tightened manacles.

Damn! was so close! I was _this _close to finally seeing _him_! And ending this all! Now I was bound!

No, there had to be a way, there had to be! My thoughts immediately turned back to my hips. Yes, I still had that didn't I? My chains weren't so tight that they kept my from touching my own feet.

I reached downwardâ€| and found my secret weapon was not there.

Utter horror echoed within my being. I was without the one thing I knew that would break me from this prison.

How did my captors know? Unlessâ€| Oh no...

All there was around me was darkness and stone and I knew beyond all reasonable doubt that I had no hope.

"Looking for this 'aint'cha?" I turned my gaze at the entrance of my

cell. A large, yet aging man holding my pack, letting light from a nearby torch illuminate enough that there was no doubt I could see it.

I snarled. "Give that back!"

The fat man sneered at me. "And let you run off? Hah! I am no fool, Night Fury."

I glared him. He knew about me, well, that was fine. At least I knew where he stood. "You can't do this to me!" I barked with as much anger and frustration as I could muster. I had rights and among them was not being locked up in a prison!

"Then return what you stole!" he shouted. Throwing the bag away.

If he was nearer and if I had the means, I would have bitten off his arm, snapped it like a twig. "It was never _yours to begin with!" _ I shouted, letting my rage surge forth. I pulled and tugged at my chains, wishing that I could rend the old man's throat with claws that didn't exist. "Neither you,, nor _even the Emperor himself _holds claim over it!"

The pulling wore me out, sapped my strength, making me collapse backwards once I no longer had the strength to give.

The old man glared at me. "Be that as it may, your boasting isn't going to get you anywhere, _dragon."_

I glared back. "I am _still a Roman citizen! _And _still _a _man!"_

"And I am Consul here!" he spat in my general direction. "Rome has invested power in _me_ to oversee its lands and among my duties is retrieving that treasure you took."

I returned the favor and spat in his face. "Then return the_ lives _that were lost because of men like you!"

The fat Consul wiped his face and beamed at me, his face red as the fire he held. "Oh, I should kill you for that!"

"Good!" I barked, struggling against my chains, renewed strength within me. "Then neither you, nor the Emperor, nor anyone else know where I hid that damn thing!"

The Consul's glare would melt stone if it could. The threat of killing me was just too good to pass up; the only things holding him back was the knowledge that he still _needed me alive_.

"Consul!" I heard a voice pipe up behind the large man. "Is that you down there?"

Danger and frustration still beamed out of the Consul's face, even his voice had a grating quality to it that made me think of a millstone. "Ah, Prefect Fish," he said with little to no enthusiasm, profession. "What brings you here? Can't you see I'm a little busy?"

"The Legate was wondering where you had gone off to," replied Prefect

Fish, stepping close enough for me to see him in the dim lighting of my cell. His face was a little paler than most men I had seen before, the hair on his head was red, unusual given that this man was a Roman soldier of moderate rank at least. Still, he was built like a soldier shout, average height. He looked familiar for some reason, though a part of me doesn't remember why. Still, why did a Roman have such an odd name like "Fish"?

The Consul frowned. "Tell him I'm busy! I'm trying to get our captive to spill the location of where he hid that blasted object.

The Prefect rolled his eyes. Apparently he didn't like the Consul too much either; that won some points from me. "And when dragons raid our convoys a little trinket isn't going to stop that _Sea Dragonicus Giganticus Maximus_ from sinking our ships!"

I blinked. Wait, did he just say what I think he said?

The Consul scowled. "Hmph, it's the only thing that matters. The Legate thinks we can combat beings like it with might and battle tactics, you and I both know why that is the wrong thing to do."

The Prefect sighed. "I know, I know, dragons aren't simple animals; they can think."

I narrowed my eyes upon hearing that. Most of the world, including Rome, didn't believe dragons, were more than just a different type of animal. I was cautious, especially because everything pretty much started because some upstart politicians found out about a trinket my family held for generations. The fact that we thought and walked among men was of no consequence to them for some reason I could not fathom.

The Consul nodded his head in what I guessed to be a measure of approval. "Good, just remember these things. I know that you are of... " he struggled to find a polite word to say, but in the end it still came out distasteful. "..._native _stock, but you've clearly proven yourself capable in your studies if I recall, and quite recently in battle, no doubt earning your rank."

"...Right." the Prefect looked away from the fat man.

The Consul put his hand on the soldier shoulders. "Don't worry about it; I'm sure you'll do fine." He laughed. "Maybe, when my term is over, I should nominate you to be administrate this region"

That got the younger man's attention, his eyes lighting up. That was clearly important to him.

That only caused me to stare at the two of them intently. They probably forgot I was even here. It was clear that the two of them had some sort of connection, one that probably explained away why Romans went around busting into the homes of the Night Furies that dwelt among them as of late. I don't even know what's been happening, but I've seen dozens of homes and families torn apart for unknown reasons before they could mount an effective defense. These two were involved in it and I wanted to know why.

Then the younger man shook his head and stood his ground. "The Legate still wants you in the main room to plan out how we're supposed to

get more provisions and ration our remaining supplies.. There's no telling how long it'll be before another ship can get through while that titanic dragon is in the way of our supply lines."

The Consul sighed. "I suppose we doâ€¦I ran out of those little live dragonling snacks I quite like so much not too long ago..."

I gagged. I know that I was a Night Fury and all and that the dragons involved in that were pretty much completely separate species, but I still found the act of eating young Common or Garden dragons a little distasteful, especially since some liked to do it live!

Unfortunately, that was all the noise I needed to make to remind the Consul that I was still here. He then turned and gave me a little look. "Hm, say, does the Legate need you Prefect Fish?

"No, at least, I don't think I need to be taken back just yet."

"Perfect. Then maybe you can do me a favor."

"Uh, sure, what do you need?" questioned the Prefect.

"Stay here a moment, can you to continue my interrogation in my stead." The Consul patted the younger man on the shoulder once again, making the other wince in a minor discomfort. "You're one of the few people here who know what's really at stake, can I trust you with carrying out this task? And I do think you kind of earned the privilege considering last night's events."

"Uh-uh," the man stuttered. "Uh, why uh, of course, Consul... I'd-I'd be happy to."

"Excellent. Maybe he'll listen to you more than he would me," the man then turned and walked out of sight, leaving me alone with the Prefect as my interrogator.

I glared at the young man. He was connected with the Consul in some manner and that I didn't like, especially since I had no idea who he was. "So, you're a dragon? Funny, you don't quite look like one to me," he said, his tone wasn't one of ignorance, either. I didn't find him funny.

"If you can't tell, I'm a man, too!" I said, extra loud just in case he could hear me. He probably saw me like I was some sort of caged rabid animal given all the trouble the Romans have been giving me ever since I left the Capital. This man was likely no different, just another enemies.

The man kept his eyes locked, his expression unreadable. "You areâ€¦" he said, his tone sounding so uncertain. And I wasn't sure that that meant. He was clearly studying me, trying to figure me out. Well, I hope he realizes that I hate being here, because that's all he's going to get.

"And don't forget it!" I snarled.

"I won't," he replied. "I justâ€¦I want to know somethings."

I smirked. I knew where this was going, but I pretend to play like I didn't know. "Like what?" Obviously, he wanted to know where I hid the gem."

"What did a man like you do to get put in Rome's Most Wanted list?"

I blinked. "Wait, what?"

He shrugged, taking up a nearby chair and sitting in it, face right in front of my cell. "You've been a fugitive for aboutâ€¦ a year, I think. The town criers and the forums have kind of been talking about it ever since the public had been told about what happened."

I just stared, curious. "What-what did they say?" I mean, I know it's been a while since it happened and all, but still, a whole year? Man, I never expected everything would go so far.

The Prefect took the time to look up above him, probably imagining or remembering.. "That you were a thief who had refused to hand over property that belonged to the government and that you violently refused to hand it over. And ever since you've been on the run, but a few months ago, news about you just stopped coming, like you'd disappeared.

"Yeah...disappeared..." I replied, bitterly. I fled up to the North, to these isles to get away from the Romans completely. I even spent some time around the islands, around the villagers enjoying not being a criminal. Sure, the locals gave me looks because I was an outsider. My skin might have been a little too tanned for their liking, but that was better than anything else especially since it meant. No, he was just luring me into a false sense of security, he wanted to know where I hid it. I snarled, getting defensive, but not acting upon it just it. "But that wasn't what happened!"

The Prefect's eyes narrowed. "Then what did happen?"

So, he wanted to know, did he? Well, fine, I'll tell him! "What happened was that I came home one day and found my home ransacked and burned!"

The Prefect noticeably shivered at my words. Somehow, the idea of being burned alive got to him.

"Roman soldiers were standing outside the wreckage, but they weren't there to help," I spat at him. He didn't react, only just kept narrowing his eyes, focusing on me. No doubt imagine how he was going to best kill me! "No, instead I saw them butcher up anyone who tried to make it out! You know us to be dragons, but we're as human as everybody else when we look like it! I saw people burn to death! Friends, family, anyone who nearby. I saw one of the neighbors who didn't know anything about us get gutted by a spear because she went over to our house for dinner that day!"

The Prefect didn't move or even blink and that just made me angry. I wanted to see him on his rage and hate manifest, just so I didn't have to worry or think about his motivations.

"The only reason I survived was because I ran and flew all over the Empire. But no matter where I went, no matter where I turned, Romans

were there and Romans butchered anyone who got in the way! All because they want a stupid trinket!" I took shelter with relatives of mine, other Night Furies who lived among men, but many met grizzly ends because of my pursuers. I also had help along the way, another dragon, one far older than I tell me that there were places outside of Roman control.

"And that's why you ran hereâ€¦ all the way to the Barbaric Archipelago?" he wondered aloud.

I nodded. "And things were great after that! No one tried to kill me for because of a trinket!" I'll admit, I probably could have ditched the damn thing and given it to the Romans in surrender, but after the trouble I've been through, I wasn't giving it up so easily. Besides, the one time I tried, I almost got an arrow put in my chest because I did.

He nods. "Well, if it wasn't for the recent push to annex Germania, were probably would have never found you again."

"Hmph. And here I was thinking I had it made! I could have lived my whole life in peace!"

For some reason, Prefect Fish jittered in his chair, his face contorted into a cringe. "Yeah, you could have; I'm sorry that you had to go through all this trouble in the first place and then had it all taken from you at the last moment."

I blinked. "Uh.. thank you." Why was he being soâ€¦ patient with me? It was creepy. I shook my head, no, he was just going to get under my skin.

"So, you're a Roman?" he asked.

"Citizen," I replied. "I wasn't born there, nor was I given much wealth, but I did have enough money that I was afforded a modicum of respect." Most of it did come from my parents though, a small inheritance, of which that bauble that started this mess was a part of.

"It sounded comfy," he replied.

I narrowed my eyes at that. There was something he wasn't telling me, and I wanted to know what's up. Why was he not angry about me? "Is something wrongâ€¦ Fish?" I said, appropriating that strange name the Consul used for him.

His eyes moved in a circular motion. "Ugh, not _you, too!" _he said.

I smirked. That really got to him, the first I managed to get a reaction from him all night. "So, what's the matter, _Fish?" _I teased. "You don't like your name?"

He sighed. "I keep telling everyone that it's not my name, but _still _people insist on it!"

I laughed. "So then what's your name, _Fish?" _I insisted.

And then, he replied to me influent, perfectly fluent Norse, the

language that was spoken in the isles, not Latin, "My name is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock, the Hope and Heir of the Tribe of Hairy Hooligans!"

I blinked. I just barely caught it all, I probably would have only understood complete gibberish if I didn't at least bother learning a bit of the Nordic tongue. A big, long name in Norse with an epithet and everything "Fish, no Hiccup was a local, or at least lived nearby that to learn the language.

"Yeah, I know, the name is made longer by the title, but it's kinda mandatory where I'm from," he said, switching back to Latin.

I only stared at him, stunned. "Yeah, I imagine it does...how's the son of a Chief get to be a Roman Prefect?" I also felt a little, odd for some reason. The name struck a chord in me, though I can't explain why.

He shrugged. "Politics. And my brothers. Dad took the offer Rome sent about educating some of us Heirs because it meant that my two brothers wouldn't get the chance to leave me stranded on a mountain top!"

I blinked. That did not sound like proper brotherly behavior.

Hiccup noticed this and continued. "Well, it's happened like twice before. Plus, he didn't want to see me again for because I kind of messed up his farm."

"And so he thought sending you to Rome would make you better?"

Hiccup took off his helmet, showing his face to me for the first time. He didn't look too much older or younger than I did, now that I saw him. "Either that, or he hoped I'd burn all of Rome to the ground! But here I am, an Officer in the Legion! So now that I'm old enough, they want to then send me back."

"Well, good for you then."

He shrugged. "I think I'm going to miss heated floors honestly."

I gave him a sympathetic nod. That was a nice feature that I was these Northerners had. It felt strange exchanging idle chitchat with Hiccup. I mean, he didn't seem to be angry or threatening me. A part of me still felt like he was secretly manipulating my emotions, but then again he didn't strike me that way. All the better to manipulate me, I guess.

"So, what's your game?" I asked, wanting to know what the reason behind all this was.

Hiccup cringed in his seat, but I saw resolve flicker in his eyes. "I want to know"

"Know what?"

"Know what you're going to do if I set you free?"

I blinked. What? Why was a Roman Prefect, well, Norse-Roman Prefect

considering this? That made no sense! "Wait, you're going to let me go?"

"Personal reasons." He shrugged and pulled out a really big key. "So, you want out or what?"

On the one hand, I knew there had to be some reason he was doing this. On the other, it meant I could finally see the sun again. Well, there was one way to know for sure if he was genuine or not. "I can't fly."

"You mean, this?" Then he pulled something from his back, a leather satchel, my bag. Last I saw it, the Consul discarded it andâ€¦ completely forgot that it was right in this room. When Hiccup got his chair, he also got the bag.

"Give it to me!" I demanded.

Hiccup tossed it inside my case, it landed on my feet. I opened the bag and found a black cloak, made of cloth and shaped into the silhouette of my dragon form, the talisman I needed to change back and forth at my command. All of us had one for some reason, but hey, it was handy and simple to make when it came down to it.

"So, what are you going to do with it?" asked Hiccup.

"Find shelter, a place I can stay," I replied, dreaming of my plans for freedom. There was a dragon who offered me aid one before. If this dragon that was harassing the Romans was the same one that aided me, maybe he'd do so again. After all, the Romans had their Emperor, I might as well have a King of my own to aid meâ€¦.

And it was at the end of that thought that I realized something important. He was no King, I refused to be subjected to the _Red Death, _a second time. It was his fault that Mom, Dad, andâ€¦ wait, what?

I blinked. Where did that strange and random thought come out of?

I looked back at my cowl andâ€¦ I felt a hand grab onto mine. "Uh, you might want to wake up now," said Hiccup, stepping into my view. He was still the Roman Prefect, at the same timeâ€¦ he wasn't. Since when did Hiccup look so scrawny, soâ€¦ young?

"Uh, Hiccup?" I questioned.

"Uh, budâ€¦ we have got to talk..I think..."

I blinked. He was my enemy, why was he.

Another blink and then Hiccup was gone, taking the rest of the world with him.

I was left in a field of black sky with no end, no limit.

It wasn't until he left that I realized where I was and what the younger boy was trying to tell me.

I opened my eyes and lifted myself out of bed. My head felt like it had a mild headache, not axe splintering bad, but it was close. I

wiped the weariness and sleep from my eyes, just in time to see my brother crawl out of bed just in front of me.

"Okay, _that _was _weird," _he said.

I nodded. What was that about?

* * *

><p>"You know, a few years ago, I'd probably say that was all just a dream..." Fishlegs took a bite out of his breakfast, a leftover leg of beef that somehow managed to evade consumption at a feast for Vikings.<p>

I nodded, taking a moment to contemplate my oatmeal. It was all I could look at with my eyes still weary from sleep. I'd be fine in an hour or so, when Dagur's attempts to kill me or disregard for sanity would wake me up. Whenever he showed up. Right now, I didn't mind to having a meal without my new-old friend making me uneasy, even if it was in the dungeons. There were some tables set out for us when we woke up and the servants reassured us that the Chief was going to be too busy with things to have breakfast and so gave us the go-ahead to eat while we waited for me. So, a couple of us who had nothing better to do decided to stick around. I probably would have been a little more wary if I wasn't so distracted right now.

"Well, it _was _just a dream," I reminded my oldest friend. A very odd dream my brother and I shared together, despite not being connected together. "But last I checked my dreams have only normal only most of the time."

"Oh, puhlease!" muttered Snotlout, approaching. His plate was overloaded with varieties of leftover meats, mostly sausage links. He took his seat as gently as he would a boulder would fall and then went straight into eating his way through his portions. "Yough aweighs get dis one dweam," he choked out, chewed up meat stuck in his mouth. Thankfully, he swallowed it before he continued on. "It's always that dream with the Romans trying to kill you! Every single time!" The only reason Snotlout knows about that old recurring nightmare is because the first time it happened I kinda let it slip to him and he's always been teasing me about it after every time I headed back home.

"Yeah, every single time!" It was always the same dream back when I was younger. Always the Romans. Always the Consul and Prefect. "But this time it was different!"

"How?" Snotlout shrugged, he looked far more interested in his meat than the conversation, but he still looked like he was trying to feign it.

"Well, this time _I _was a Roman Prefect!" Of all of the weird dreams I had in the past few months, revisiting an old dream I had was on the top of the list. Instead of a generic dream where the Consul and Prefect were outside of the prison cell and I wasn't, I actually understood what was going on.

I knew the Prefect as my ancestor now, the Hiccup the First! Oh, I bet that's something I never would have known otherwise if I didn't end up _being him _for a few minutes! And the man in the cell, the

one who from whose perspective I saw from all the time before, and the one my brother ended up being last night, he was like another one of my ancestors, a Night Fury who fled Rome! Who knew that perhaps the two most important of my ancestors knew each other?

I sighed. I thought a while back that I was done having to go back in time and relive an event my brother's or my Mom's past, but apparently, now I was going to work my way down the family tree or was that _up?_

Fishlegs took out a notebook and began flipping through some details. "You know, you said a while back your dreams were the result of, well, you know who messing with your head."

I nodded. "Yeah, I think he put in Mom's memories to base off an edited version of my life but didn't finish."

Fishlegs pursed lip and then wrote a line of text I couldn't see on his notebook. "But what if it isn't?"

That thought stayed with me for a while. It was easy to say that witnessing the events I had seen before were from a mix of memories from Mom and my brother. I wasn't sure what to think if it turned out that assumption was wrong. If that wasn't the reason for my weird dreams, then what was? "What do you mean?" I questioned my oldest friend.

Fishlegs shrugged his head. "I don't know either, but I'm thinking What if it's tied in the same reason you used to have the same dream over and over again when coming here?"

And sleeping in the same cell every time I came over. I turned my back to the converted prison cells, each used to hold captives inside, but now were used as 'alternative' shelter for some reason I never fully understood. I always slept in the same converted room because that was what was assigned to me. Now that I thought about it, wasn't that the same room that I saw my ancestor chained in?

But why did sleeping in that room oh, so that's why. Trader Al, or Ruseclaw, as we came to truly know him once talked about a something called resonance, using that to explain that I was a Night Fury. While, I don't really understand how it relates to my being a descended from what was apparently a whole line of dragons who walked among humans, it does help me understand one crucial thing. In sorcery, connecting things together, either words to ideas, or people to things caused things to happen.

The room was important because it was the moment where my ancestors first befriended each other, the moment where it fundamentally tied both of our families together, if not in blood, but in destiny, until they resulted in me and my little brother. This was where it all started and it was that fact made it worth going back. Maybe the only reason I never saw the dream in full before was because I needed more things to match things up, either my brother or maybe to fully turn into a dragon at least once.

Now if only I knew more about my ancestor. Why was he a Roman Officer beyond the reasons stated above? Why was he so willing to let a man who can turn into a Night Fury run free when that could have costed him his job? Or worse, his life! I was him for all of that time and I

still didn't know why, it was like he didn't like thinking of his reasons himself! And what happened to him after that? Did he get reprimanded? Did my Night Fury ancestor end up meeting the King? And what was this trinket that Rome was willing to hunt down their own people?

Suddenly, a sick feeling went through my stomach. After finally realizing what it was the King was trying to show me that day a few months ago. When he showed me the Night Furies getting annihilated by the Roman army, I thought it was a little odd because the battle wasâ€¦ so, well, dramatized. Now that I knew better, about my so-far unnamed ancestor, about the weird quirks my grandfather spoke about, how it was something we all did, I had to wonder; were there ever any Night Furies that _weren't human? _Just what was so valuable that it justified killing innocent people? Not dragons, not beasts, but peopleâ€¦

"You okay, Hiccup?" I heard Fishlegs say, hovering over me.

I shook my head, returning to the real world. Well, I guess that was one thing the King and Rome shared, lack of regard for those who got in their way. "I'm fine, really."

Fishlegs looked at me skeptically. "I dunno, you were off looking at your soup for quite a bit longer than usual."

I raised up a finger and wagged it in a teaching gesture. "Only _slightly." _Besides, I was kinda losing track of time.

Fishlegs sighed. "What I want to know isâ€¦ why do you have all these weird dreams in the first place?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Not a clue, but I'll work on it.." If it wasn't because of my head getting nearly turned into mush, then what was it? The dreams in Fort Sinister have been happening for a while. I turned over to the other end of the room, where the rest of my friends, including Astrid and my brother Toothless were. They were off busy doing a game of sorts, I think something involving cards with Camicazi. Hm, I wonder if there were other dreams my brother had that might prove insightfulâ€¦

And then, I turned to Snotlout, who was also looking at Astrid's general direction, like usual. Although, I can't help but feel there was something off about him now. He seemedâ€¦ a little more depressed than usual, which was saying something considering a minute ago he was happily eating through sausage links and bacon.

"Snotlout?" I called to him, wondering what was bothering him.

My cousin turned to me for a second, his expression not one of anger. "Not really, no," he sounded tired, weary for some reason. He did what he could to make himself look less suspicious, but that sent up a bunch of red flags.

There was something he wasn't telling me, and I honestly wondered what it was. I opened my mouth andâ€¦

And then before I could speak, I saw Dagur take the seat right next to me right in my periphery vision. I quickly turned to him, just in time to see that big grin on his face. "So, about that dragon, this,

_Red Death. _I'd like to know more."

* * *

><p>To anyone who doesn't remember, recall that way back Chapter of the previous story Hiccup made an offhand reference to a Consul and Prefect? Well, now you know what inspired this chapter.

Interesting bit of trivia. Romans did not keep prisons like we did. They either killed wrong doers on the spot, or if they were rich put them under house arrest. Civilian prisons were for executions or slaves. Military installations did keep that. Also, Roman social classes are quite complicated, so I am leaving things up obscured up til now.

For those of you wondering why Hiccup's ancestor, Hiccup, well, the first, is in a Roman Legion, it's actually a reference to a historical event in which the Romans offered to hold a barbarian chieftain's children under willful captivity in order to give them a good (Roman) education.

34. Chapter 34

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise. '*

Got this out a little later than expected. Anyways, this arc is going to be rather, interesting.

Please Read and Review.

* * *

><p>It's funny how I'm oddly relieved about seeing Dagur at this time of day. I guess compared to everything else, talking to the newly crowned Berserker Chief is the least complicated thing I could do this morning. I knew Dagur enough that I didn't have to worry about him try to backstab me, betray me, have ulterior motives, or just being outright be confusing to deal with. No, Dagur was straight forward.<p>

Fishlegs ducked into his shirt within a split second, just enough time to avoid having his head split in two. Dagur tossed a dagger at my oldest friend, and the sad part was, he wasn't actually _trying _to kill him. Dagur took a bite of his bread, now that it was freshly cut. "So | tell me again, how do I make myself a legend?" Dagur said, a mouth full of bread. Note to self, invent knives that can be used in eating without killing someone |. by accident.

I gulped and waved a hand to dismiss my friend. Fishlegs didn't waste any time leaving to the table nearby. I couldn't blame him. "Are you sure you want to? I mean, the Red Death is not an ordinary dragon."

"Pft!" Dagur waved his hands in dismissal. "What's the worst that could happen?"

"Well, you could die-"

"Yawn," Dagur replied, actually saying the word instead of actually yawning. "Tell me something that doesn't come with the job description."

"-your entire army could get routed-"

"And that'd still make for a good epic!" Dagur drank from a mug, displaying a thumb raised to the skies. He wiped off his drink quickly. "Lots of heroes die and leave behind awfully tragic stories. I'm sure my story will be good!"

I sighed. I should have known better than to appeal to Dagur's common sense. "The Red Death is seriously powerful- and big! Like, could be a kid-of-Loki-big and well, he's the king of the trolls! I don't think sending an armada is going to bother him!"

"Oh, so we go it alone with a small band of warriors to face him!" Dagur beamed, his face sending all kinds of warning signs going off in my head. "I mean, it's not an armada, but nothing says 'insane-odds' like a small group fighting a really big monster."

"He's got his own forces that are very devoted and loyal to him, no way a small group is going to make it through all of the dragons," I replied. Unless I could for some reason convince the King to go do something that leaves him very exposed, like an honor-challenge or something and I found that likely. I mean, what were the odds that he'd be so willing in throwing away his victory in such a stunt?

"Oh, _then _we just use the armada to occupy his forces!" Dagur looked giddy. "That way, any survivors can go and witness the event first hand so that my victory, or defeat, is remembered forever! Excellent thinking, Hiccup!"

"And I happily accept your approval over ideas you made up yourselfâ€|" I grumbled to myself.

Dagur looked at me for a moment in confusion. "Uh, what?"

"Nothing." I shook my head.

"Great!" Dagur then bit into some meat and tore the flesh. Then he pointed at me with his free hand. "Say, Hiccup, look, I know you'reâ€| like the best, well, first advisor I had for this sort of thing, but how are you going to attend the battle? I mean, I like you _now, _but you're still kind of a wimp."

"Oh, don't worry, I remind myself of that fact every day!" Well, kinda. I stopped pointing out how skinny I was after Mom moved back in, but lately, I've gotten back in the habit of doing it ever since, well, that incidentâ€| I shook my head; I only had one real weapon to show for, atleast one that Dagur was willing to accept. "I'm going to turn into a NIGHT Fury."

Dagur froze, the first I had ever really seen him that stunned. In fact, he was so stunned that his oatmeal was oozing out of his mouth. He wiped it off once I pointed to the fact he was getting it all over his tunic. "Okay, really, you're going to go fight a dragonâ€| _as a

dragon!" _

I shrugged. "Well, it's not like I don't have experience doing that!" In fact, I was sure I had more fighting experience as a dragon than in my natural human body.

Drago was about to open his mouth and answer my reply, but he was caught mid-gasp, unable to think of a good counter just yet. "So, you're just going to, like up and turn yourself into a dragon?"

"Pretty much, once the time is right." Point is, if it meant saving Mom and Dad, I was willing to forsake my humanity entirely. Once, the spell on me was completely broken, I was going to throw myself in a fire and start spitting out high explosive projectiles. In fact, if the spell that was keeping from turning back was already broken and if the plans for taking back my parents were set up, I probably would have taken the time to start practicing more directlyâ€¦ Granted, I knew the chances of actually rescuing Mom and Dad were slim.

Dagur seemed to consider something for a moment. "Hm, I wonder is turning into a dragon supposed to be a good or bad thing?" He said, putting his hands up to make imaginary weighing scales. "I mean, on the one hand, I can breathe fire, or even better, lightningâ€¦ but on the other, how will I talk to my subjectsâ€¦ Say, Hiccup, you were a dragon once, you got any tricks?"

I slapped myself in the forehead. Great, I explain to Dagur my plan and he was considering doing it himself. Why was it always the insane people who consider turning into a dragon is a smart idea? Then again, I wasn't much better was I? Pot and kettle. Whatever, I had to discourage Dagur from considering that plan. "Uh, you don't want to do that!"

"Bah. Why not?" Dagur commented. "I mean, you get to be a Night Fury! Maybe it'll turn out my grandpa was right too!"

"But what if you turn into a Terror?" I said, feigning an alarmed tone. I had a perfect idea to completely discourage him from considering the idea.

"Soâ€¦?" Dagur seemed a little hesitant now. "I mean, what are the chances someone like me turning into oneâ€¦?"

"And what were the chances I was a Night Fury of all things!?" I said. In hindsight, pretty high, but I didn't need my friend to know that. "Point is, I know a guy or two who ended up turning into Terrors!"

"I can confirm!" said Fishlegs, sitting at a table away. He was writing off notes. "Even to console a few people like that, one of them even ended up gettingâ€¦ well, an interesting winter with her daughter cause of that! And they were big Vikings before."

"That might not be so bad, won't itâ€¦?" He looked to me for reassurance. "I mean, you could turn me, back, right?" Dagur kept both eyes focused on me, this time looking a little worried, probably the most I ever seen him. It was an experience, I guess proves that even Dagur the Deranged has some sense of priority, some sense of what he can take. I guess, out of all of us, the threat of being

reduced to a small, near defenseless dragon that even I could take was not something he could deal with.

"Sure, _maybe, _I could," I replied, putting emphasis on doubting the possibility. "_Maybe I can't. _I mean, it's not like turning back between dragon and human form is as easy as putting on garments of clothing, isn't it?_" _ Well, for my ancestors and the people who were born dragons, it was, but Dagur didn't need to know that, either. That'd just undermine my case really.

"But it's so unlikely, I'll turn into a Terrorâ€¦. I mean, just how many kinds of dragons are t-"

I interrupted him and decided to end this debate once and for all. "Drago, I know we call them Terrors and all, but the Romans called them Common-or-Gardens, because there's just so many of them and they tend to just hide in people's gardens. Do you want that to happen to you? To spend the rest of your life burrowing in someone's flowerpots to eat their carrots?"

Dagur gave me a look of genuine disgust, even he had standards. "Ugh! You're totally right, Hiccup!" He slapped himself in the head, likely to get whatever mental images he conjured up out of there. "Gah, what was I thinking? Turning into a dragon, yeah, right!"

"Well, good, because then I didn't need to bring about the possibility of being a Squirrel-Serpent; those come in many varieties, including spotted!" Well, that was one crisis averted. Strange how I knew that trivia fact about Terrors in Rome, but then again, I did kinda just wake up from dreaming from being a commanding officer in that army. Shame I didn't know more about my ancestor, Hiccup the First.

"Okay, so we both know you and I are going to face the Red Death," Dagur paused to think. "Who else is coming?"

"Well, how about your whole fleet?" I said. I mean, unless Dagur forgot he said bringing a whole armada there was a smart move; I wouldn't put it past him to go that far. There was the certain matter of thatâ€¦ whatever it is in that fog that kept ships and dragons from just simply moving onto the island in a straight line.

Dagur gave a dismissive look. "Yeah, yeah, we'll get to them later, I just want to know who I'll be sharing the glory with!"

I naturally went with the people I felt like fighting the most with. "I got plenty of friends who are able to help us out here."

"Oh, you mean like him?" Dagur pointed a knife at Fishlegs. Fishlegs ducked under his chair and overturned it by accident as Dagur pointed.

"Uh, kinda," I said, waving up at Fishlegs to get up. "But know four people who might want to get involved when we face the Red Death."

"Oh?"

"Well, first there's Stormfly." I said, point at the red haired girl with the whitescarf looking into the game the others were playing.

She was urging Toothless to bet higher and higher against Meatlug for some reason. "She's good in a fight. I've seen her." Those lessons with Astrid kinda did pay off.

"Hm, odd name for a Viking," Dagur wondered. "Can't ever think of why anyone would ever name her that."

I shrugged. "Hey, as far as naming traditions go, I've heard worse."

"Oh, yeah, definately!"

"Next is Astrid." I moved my hand a little over to the right, pointing at my girlfriend.

"Hey, isn't she that girl who you used to..." Dagur had a very frightening grin of my own. Or it would be, if this time I didn't already know what it was about.

I gave Dagur a little grin of my own. "Girlfriend! You're a little late."

Dagur swung his arms in disappointment. "Argh! And here I was thinking you hadn't already done that!"

"Well, it's not like I made it a big secret anyways!" I said.

"Whatever, so, she's coming?"

"Astrid shouldn't go!"

Both Dagur and I were caught off guard. We both turned our heads around to see Snotlout, looking at the others, still locked in that odd, unsettled gaze of his. "Uh, what?" Dagur and I both said.

"She shouldn't fight the King," Snotlout said, using the Red Death's real, well, official title. "It's a bad idea."

"Well, it's not like, we can stop her!" I raised my arms and voice, but it still didn't interrupt the card game. "I mean, you know she's just going to shove herself into the fray just because _I'm there!"

—

Snotlout shook his head. "I know, but look, I got this bad feeling about that! just, look we can't lose her."

I frowned. What was my cousin talking about? Was this about earlier? I mean, I guess maybe he felt that risking Astrid in this major battle might cost her everything. Hm, maybe I should keep her back, away from the most dangerous fight of them all.

And maybe I should for good measure find some way to break up with her, because I already knew that wasn't going to work.

"Well, whatever then." replied Dagur, losing interest in my girlfriend. "Who else?"

"Snotlout," I pointed at my cousin. "He's tough strong, thick headed, but I seen him break—"

"I'm not going either," He interrupted.

"Wait, what?" I turned at my cousin in surprise. That wasâ€¦|
unthinkable. Why was Snotlout, always eager to prove himself, fight
with dragons, or prove himself _to dragons, _so hesitant _now of all
times?_ This was the chance of a lifetime and he was just content to
sit on the sidelines.

"You heard me...I think I should sit this one out."

"Who are you and what have you done with my cousin?"

Snotlout shrugged. "Look, just, maybe I'll think about it, justâ€¦|
not now." And then he got up and left.

I just sat there, an expression on my face that Dagur probably found
humorous. I mean, who would have ever thunk I would see Snotlout of
all peopleâ€¦| just do that? Did this have anything to do with a
certain sister of Hookfang? I sighed.

"So, that's two down, of your four," Dagur commented. "So, is like,
your fourth one going to back out as well?"

"No, no he won't." I pointed at my brother, my only surviving
immediate family now. "Toothless should come with us too."

Dagur squinted, as if considering. "Hm, I dunno, he's a little
scrawny."

"Not as much as I am, and you know how strong I really am."

"But you're cheating though. I mean, you'll be turning into a dragon
to fight this out." Then, Dagur snapped his fingers an idea coming
into his head, one that I already knew I wasn't going to like. "Hm,
your brother going to like, turn into a dragon too?"

"If he gets desperate enough, but we likely won't have to resort to
that." We did manage to get the cloak shaped into a Night Fury
silhouette repaired after getting some help from Gothi, but Toothless
still hasn't found the time to use it and, well, I wasn't sure it was
a smart idea for me to wear it just yet, not to mention I had little
idea of how it'd affect me with the spell still working on me. I
guess since my secret was out, the worst I had to worry about was
Dagur wanting me to fly him.

Dagur pursed his lips. "I dunno, there's that (Ragnar the Red) fella
from the Tribes near the West Coast; he's offered to come!"

"Well, it's not like our hunting party has a maximum size."

"Yeah, but the more people there are, the less glory we get! I mean,
there's only so much glory to go around, even on this great
dragon!"

If there is any glory to be had, I didn't want it. I just wanted to
either beat the King and take my parents back by force, or maybe if I
could, just avoid the whole fight in the first place. Whatever option
meant my family just walkingâ€¦| or flying away. Still, it's not hard
for me to see that I probably would have thought as Dagur did, not

too long ago, back when I valued making a name for myself above all else. "Just trust me, there's plenty enough glory to go around."

Dagur pouted, a little upset. "Fine, I guess he can come, but he's got to show me what he can do first."

I smiled. Dagur was as good as ours now; now all that's left to do was to take care of the issue of the spy and Alvin before everything gets started. "Sure, no problem," I said, leaving my seat. "I'm sure if you'll ask him to, he'll show you what he's got."

"Hey, wait, where are you going?"

"Off to see some friends. I just remembered, I had somewhere to be right now." Well, technically, I didn't forget. I just got so sidetracked and my appointment was going to be soon. "Coming Fish?" I gestured at my oldest friend and he followed along.

"But, wait, aren't you like, going to stay to support your brother and all?" Dagur followed me.

"Oh, I am giving him supportâ€¦ just not in the immediate vicinity of him." I wish I could stay and watch the demonstration, but I already knew what he had in store. I did after all help him with the corrections he needed to make to finish his new creation; I mean, I love the fact my brother can read and write, but his math skills are still a little off. I already gave him all of the help and support he needed.

I smiled at myself, imagining the how it'll all play out. Lots of explosions, lots of chaos, and a whole lot of stunned Vikings, I think. I might never get to see that, but I given our track record, I couldn't imagine anything else.

And then, I remembered something important; Dagur's probably got his own ideas for determining if my brother was worthy or not..

I gulped. Well, I how bad can it be?

"Uh, Hiccup," I heard Fishlegs say. "Maybe it's just me spending my time with Meatlug, but I'm prettty sure you're not _supposed_ to utter that sentenceâ€¦since that's supposed to, you know might make things worse."

I turned to my oldest friend, my face twisted up in an awkward smile. Yeah, this was going to be one of those days. I can't even keep track of what I meant to say or not.

Fishlegs sighed, "You did it again."

* * *

><p>The world spun out of control and I was left wondering why the sky was on the ground for a moment there. That was funny. People don't belong in the sky I mean. Funny thing was there was this round brown cloud right next to me. Now, I remember this saying that there was that saying about a silver lining to every cloud, but I mean, why did it have to be so wooden? I mean, did it think it was a tree or...<p>

"Toothless!"

Stormfly...

I regained my senses not a moment too soon. I grabbed the nearby shield and used it to block an attack that was aimed straight for my head. A big sword punched through the thick wood, stopping just an inch short of my nose. "Woah!" I slid out from under the shield went as far away from my opponent as possible.

"Hey, get back here!" my opponent yelled. He was an average Viking warrior, which unfortunately for me meant that he was a big, burly Viking Warrior. His sword was still stuck on my shield, but that wasn't going to last long. He smashed my forsaken defense against the ground, shattering the wood into splinters and leaving being only the metal frame.

"Go on, Toothless!" Stormfly cheered, one of the few people in the whole dock who was actively on my side.

The rest of my friends cheered as well, but their cries were muffled by the sound of the audience and the disdain of our host. Dagur yawned, sitting upon a makeshift improvised throne set up about ten minutes ago. "Come on! I don't have all day!"

"Yeah! Get back in the fight!" I heard the crowd cheer.

"And get myself killed? No way!" I yelled back. And to think, there was a time when I was completely fearless of everything except my own mother; what was I thinking? I should have been scared of everything.

"Bah! You're just a yellow bellied coward! Be a real Viking!"

"Easy for you to say!" I shouted back and went straight for the weapons rack, only managing to evade another swipe just in time.

"Blast!" The sword got caught into a nearby table. My opponent grabbed another weapon from there and didn't bother keeping his previous sword, not when momentum was to be lost.

"Don't you just stop?"

"Sure, just let me take your place and then I'll go and kill me the Red Death!"

"Fat chance." More and more, I am really getting an idea of why my brother loathes Dagur so. My request was a simple one; I wanted to be there when it was time to face the King. What really irks me is that this guy is making me go through this blasted challenge spree because he wanted to know if I was 'good enough'. This guy with the sword? He was the _third _one to challenge me today.

I parried the strike just in the nick of time, but the strain of carrying and defending myself with my sword made me throw it off, leaving me with only a shield. Sadly, it seems more and more likely, I just didn't have the stuff it took to beat Vikings in open combat. Especially with how weary I was starting to feel. Carrying heavy

weaponry, shields, evading blows with raw reflexes alone, that was exhausting.

"Well, looks like I win!" said my opponent, his blade drawing close to my neck.

"Not yet, you don't!" I backed away, mindful and very aware that he could make a lunge at any moment and regaining what breath I had to ready myself for the event.

"Come on, you're just a runt!" said the grown man, probably appealing to a more rational side of my head. "Back down now and save yerself the trouble of being humiliated. Come on, as far as deze things go, yer not losing a limb!"

I gritted my teeth. Why couldn't he just take a hint? To my enemies, the Red Death was just another trophy, another prize for an ornament wall; but me, I knew what was at stake, I knew what was at risk! I was in this for more than being a glory hound like the rest of them! "No way!"

Then the man just did a shrug with one shoulder, his voice free of guilt, "Suit yourself!" And then he lunged.

The crowd cheered, my friends all gave gasps.

I honestly wish I could say that I beat him, that I a mere boy with no weapons and very little close up combat experience was able to best a fully trained and armed Viking warrior in a close-up one and one battle. It was completely unrealistic for me to win and I knew it.

Which is why I learned to take Gobber's maxim, that a shield was offense and defense rolled into a single piece of equipment, and applied my innate talents. See, like my brother, I knew that sometimes, you had to be willing to stoop to underhanded tactics and be be good at improvising when you need to, like now. I threw it at the Viking, right into his feet just as he was about to make a step. I didn't miss my mark, I never do.

At first the warrior didn't notice what I did, I mean, why wouldn't he? He was armed and lightly armored, what could have hurt him that he didn't feel already? But realization hit him the moment he stepped onto my shield while he made his charge. He lost control and slid backward, the shield unbalancing his step.

Then, he fell backwards, losing grip of his sword and having it fly straight into the air, spinning wildly and thenâ€¦

Thunk!

The crowd gasped, even Dagur got out of his seat to watch.

I went up the warrior's fallen body and looked down at his face. "So, tell me again, who's hunting the Red Death?"

The warrior grimaced at me, pulling himself off the ground. "Youâ€¦" he said, sounding defeated. I mean, he did get beat by a fourteen year old. Still, I guess he was lucky his sword was only close enough to shave off his hair.

"Good, good. Nothing to see here folks!" I said, turning back at the crowd.

Strangely the audience all looked disappointed, with a few key figures displeased the most. "Aw, man!" I heard Tuffnut, Ruffnut, Barf, Belch, and Dagur all voice the same complaint simultaneously. What it was about, I didn't know. Maybe it was because I wonâ€¦ or that there wasn't any bloodshed in the past few fights. I guess they probably wanted to see me lose... or kill someone.

I turned back to Dagur, the host of this one sided tournament to see how long it took for me to lose. "There you have it, three warriors beaten." And all because I had good aim at throwing things and knew where the best spot to land the hit was. Unfortunately, I knew that it was only going to be a matter of time before I either got exhausted enough or my opponents finally smartened up. I mean, they could all see the previous ways the losers lost. I needed to end this now. "Can we please just get this over with?"

Dagur groaned. "Fine, who's next?"

"Great, I'm next, I'm next!" I heard a voice from somewhere in the crowd. "Just let me get through and-"

I sighed and groaned. This whole challenge thing was redundant. "No, I refuse to fight in another challenge!"

"Oh," Dagur paused, interested. "So you're giving up?"

"_No," _I replied, staring him in the eye. "I'm just refusing to fight anyone else who thinks they can walk up to me and beat me up and take my right to face the Red Death!"

"Bah what do you know?" shouted another man. "You're just a scrawny runt! The son of some twobit Chief who can't be bothered to show up!"

"Heh! I keep telling you Clawface, there's probably no real 'Red Death' or whatever it is," said another. "Make believe by some crazed boy with a crazy imagination!"

I glared at the crowd. Fine, fine, so that was it? I made up my mind. "Stormfly, give it to me!" I raised my hand and took a step forward, beckoning her to come.

"Uh, Toothless?" She sounded concerned, a part of me wanted to know what was bothering her.

"I'm not going to hurt them, justâ€¦ show them..." I replied. I know what I was doing, I _needed _these other Chiefs, as much as I didn't want to admit it. I saw that my other companions were all looking a little worried, especially Meatlug and Hookfang.

"I know," replied Stormfly, still sounding a little worried. "It's justâ€¦ I mean, here, with allâ€¦"

I sighed. Whatever was bothering her it, it can wait, I think. "Look, we've been waiting to show off the new weapon for a week, I think it's time," I said, stepping closer to her.

Stormfly visibly swallowedâ€|. whatever it was that was bothering her. "Right, right." She went over to me, bringing me my new crossbow and its ammunition.

"Oh, what's this about?" Dagur tilted his head, looking quite curious.

The audience too was curious, wondering what was so special about my new weapon.

"Give me five buildings or ships that I can I can destroy in under a minute," I stated, coldly.

Dagur blinked. "Wait, what?"

"You heard me!" I replied. "Give me five targets, big ones, I can destroy!"

His hand moved over to a nearby cart, still wondering what I was talking about.

I obliged. "Out of the way!" I screamed and then pulled the trigger.

One.

The cart exploded into bright violet light and flame, the husk of the vehicle reduced to scraps and burning refuse. Anyone who was close enough to the vehicle quickly sidestepped away.

"Next target!" I cried.

Two.

A house, small, new, but clearly vacant exploded with purple light, almost as if a Night Fury himself was the shooter.

Three.

A much larger building, just as new and just as empty, a storage room of some sort that got exhausted from yesterday's festivities. I fired my shot, sending the roof to topple on burning walls.

Four.

I blasted a small rowboat off in the docks. A downgrade, maybe, but that was just building to the final target.

Five.

A longship, one of the real big ones in the harbor sank, a gaping hole torn into its starboard side, reminding me of the day I sunk so many ships in what seemed like a lifetime ago.

With my magazine emptied I turned to Dagur and the rest of the audience. Everyone could only gasp and stare at the power that I now wielded.

A long time ago I escaped from Alvin using exploding runes on metal;

this was the final result, marrying the complex workings of a repeating crossbow, similar to my first one, with the destructive power of a Night Fury's Breath. Now, the fact that the bolts when laughed did less damage on impact seemed like a trivial, replaceable loss, not when the power the bolts themselves held was far greater than the loss of 'striking power'.

"You all think you can bring a sword to fight the Red Death, that he's just like any old dragon and you can gut him with a lucky hit!" I said in the loudest voice I can manage. "But let me tell you, that's not good enough! If you can't show me that you've got the capabilities to match what I'm showing you, you got no business bothering me!"

Several of the men and women all took a step back. I knew few, if any of them, were planning on challenging me now, not when I showed them the bar they needed to stand up to.

Dagur, on top of his seat clapped., laughing like the madman he was. "You know what? I think I like you!" He said. "So, I think I'll forget about you telling me off just now. I mean, really, blowing up buildings! Ha!

I grunted and then turned back to my friends; I didn't care about Dagur anymore, just only what he promised to do for us.. I calmed myself down and stifled my rage, no I had to save it for the Red Death. "Alright, sorry about that guy, I just needed toâ€¦"

I blinked.

All of my friends were giving me an odd, timit look, including Stormflyâ€¦ like they were suddenly afraid of me. "Uh, guys?"

There was no reply not even a blink, only awkward looks that made me wonder what caused them. Were they even looking at me?

"Stormfly?"

She blinked for a second and shook her head. "Uh, it's nothingâ€¦"

"Nothingâ€¦" I replied.

She grinned, making me even more suspicious. "Yeah, just, well, you didâ€¦ destroy a lotâ€¦" The others broke from their weird trances as well, but they didn't speak to me.

"Yeah, I guessâ€¦" I said. I shook my head. Maybe now wasn't the best time to bring it up. I mean, it's clear they were acting odd in this village, but I guess that can be chalked up from anxiety, I mean, that stunt I just pulled probably made a few enemies, especially the people who owned the boats.

"Great," said Stormfly, "So, are you okay from, wellâ€¦ you know?"

"Hey, I didn't break any bones, maybe almost twisted my wrist, but I'm fine!" I sighed. She was clearly avoiding my questions.â€¦ But, I guess it can all wait for to ask.

* * *

><p>"Is this the place?" Fishlegs muttered behind me as we walked down the harbor.<p>

I nodded. "We need secrecy and Camicazi's ship is the only place on this island I am sure we'll be able conduct our dealings." There was also the matter that the hold was soundproof, a secret Camicazi let me in on.

"Alright, I just wish we had Meatlug along cause she'sâ€|."

"Fishlegs, we've been through this before," I said, keeping my voice low enough that only he was the one who heard me. "She might not be, well, you know."

"Speak for yourself," said Fishlegs. "You're asking me to turn my back on my girlfriend!"

I grimaced. "Look, let's not get her involved, for her own safetyâ€| we don't know who the traitor is, but I think we have an idea of who's not." There was a crowd forming at the other end, no doubt Dagur's ploy to measure my brother's worth. Good luck bud. Taking another look around, I saw no one following us or even noticing us as we crept on board. We needed secrecy, especially in a time like this.

Fishlegs opened the hatch. "Butâ€| why me? What good am I?"

"Because you're the one of the few people I know who hasn't made a deal with the King or been a dragon, ever," I said a matter of factly. He had a dragon for his girlfriend, but I doubted that meant much the same thing. "Well, other than the twins, but, you know themâ€|"

"Rightâ€|" Fishlegs climbed down the hatch.

I followed after him and closed the lid on us both.

Once I was down the ladder, I saw two other figures, cloaked by shadow.

I gave a sigh of relief. It seems like everyone is here.

"Alright gang, let's begin," I told them, heading over to the wall to light a small lantern.

They stepped out of the shadows and into view.

"Let's," said Camicazi, seeming to leave behind her usual cheery tone.

Thuggory nodded. "Aye."

Fishleg squeaked. "It'sâ€| dark in here, you knowâ€|"

* * *

><p>So, I decided to put a little action and the most likely way for that to happen is to make use of the fact Dagur likes people suffering. So, I put a little spin on it where it was both somewhat serious, somewhat funny, then, well, you see.

****Also, I guess now you guys know what Toothless made to challenge the King. Semi-automatic repeating crossbow with explosive bolts. I did more or less foreshadow this.****

35. Chapter 35

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Well, I got this chapter up somewhat earlier than usual. Only a two day gap instead of a 3 day one.****

****Anyways, I'm guessing this story arc will last about five or six more more chapters. I got a rough idea in what order things should show up. I do wonder what you'll think about near the end.****

****Please Read and Review.****

* * *

><p>Being in a dark, soundproof hull was not how I was thinking I was going to be spending my day when I woke up this morning. Unfortunately for me, my oldest friend has to up and have a crazy dream where he turns into a Roman, has to find a traitor in our midst, and then make sure that everything is set to go for when we deal with the King of all dragons. "You really know how to pick top secret meeting places you knowâ€|" I couldn't fully see everyone roll their eyes, but I was sure they did.<p>

"Hey, there's no place more secure than _my ship!" _chirped the girl.

Hiccup nodded, leveraging the light to better illuminate everyone's faces. "Dagur knows every spot on the island. Believe me, I tried finding secluded places all of the time here!"

"Plus, as it's Camicazi's ship, what she say goes, including the trespassing laws," added Thuggory.

I cringed, hoping to focus on the light and their faces. The darkness was everywhere. "But, but what about the others? I mean, don't you have other people you'd rather have?" Sadly, I already knew the answer.

"Because everyone else is suspect." Hiccup's face twisted into a pain expression. "Even my Toothless."

I saw Camicazi's grin beam at the mention of the former Night Fury, as if trying to hold something back.

Thuggory snorted. "Okay, he might not be an illegitimate child born in a tavern, but since he's a dragon we can't really know for certain where his allegiances lay."

"For the last time," Hiccup replied. "He was just born a dragon."

"And brought up as one!" Thuggory commented.

"Soâ€¦ we're talking about that? Here?" I said. Last I checked, the secret origins about where some people came from, especially my girlfriend were not up for public discussion. Then again we weren't public either.

Everyone nodded.

"No more secrets," said Hiccup.

"Plain and simple!" Camicazi said.

Thuggory gave a look of approval. "Yeah, because I'm getting tired of being left out. Seriously, you have _how many of your friends _actually being dragons in disguise?"

"Fiveâ€¦ if you discount Toothless and you count the Zippleback as two people," I stated, holding five fingers up.

"Yeah, so, automatically, anyone who served this _Red Death _character or _King _if you call him is automatically suspect!" Thuggory raised two hands for emphasis, showing six fingers. "Six brought up as dragons, six suspects!"

I cringed. Thinking about his words. If Thuggory is right to suspect my Meatlug, well, I just don't know what to do with myself. To think the girl that I let stay over in my own home, gave a separate bed to, and more than once left the room for was going to betray me was just something I couldn't do. Meatlug would never do itâ€¦ would she?

"Uh, maybe you're being a little harsh about _everyone _there being a suspect."

"Well, maybe not for Stormfly," said the Bog Burglar.

"Camicazi," Hiccup groaned, slapping himself in the face. "What happened a few months back is not a good enough reason."

"What?" the Bog Burglar asked. "Not my fault she and Toothless are an item!"

"No, that's your fault," Hiccup replied. "And I don't think my brother even realizes they are!"

Both of the other boys sighed and I got the feeling that this was probably a private matter, much like my relationship with Stormfly. Maybe not a good idea to stick to that topic. "So, uh, but they've been living amongst us for months, not complaining, heck, some even liking living with us!" Also, not to self, avoid mentioning my relationship with Meatlug in front of someone who suspects here. "I don't think they'd want to betray us."

"What they _want _doesn't matter," Thuggory stated plainly. "They could be coerced, made agreements they couldn't say no to. They

wouldn't _want _to betray us, but they'll _have _to anyways."

That was a chilling thought, the idea that Meatlug would one day push me off a ledge and send me to my doom because someone else pushed her to do it. And sadly, I knew enough about the King to realize it's a possibility. Meatlug told me stories about it once, I think.

Hiccup nodded. "Which also brings up the next group of our friends who are suspect; those who made deals with the King."

I blinked, raising a finger to point at my friend. "But wait, that's you and Astrid; you both made deals with the King!"

Camicazi nodded. "Well, given Chief Stoick's deal previously, it's not unthinkable the King put a booby trap in any of the pacts we made; so, as much as I don't like it, Astrid's not showing up."

I pointed at Hiccup.

"And you're here becauseâ€¦"

"Because I _have _to be here," Hiccup said. He lifted the light and gave it to me. "I might have made a pact with the King, become a dragon, even had my head looked into by the King, but no matter what, it's either me or my brother that has to take center stage when doing all this."

Thuggory nodded, patting Hiccup on the back. "And well, I know you enough that I doubt the spy is you."

"Well, unless the King rigged up some sort of top secret backdoor mindcontrol thing! Like say, you go to his side when you hear a code phrase!" Camicazi suggested, sounding strangely sincere about it.

Even I rolled my eyes at that. Now that was something that topped Gobber's most likely true story involving a Bonenapper.

"What? Ma keeps telling me that it's been done before!" Camicazi said

"Either wayâ€¦" Thuggory began.

"To ensure that that is absolutely not the case, we have a plan." Hiccup turned and looked at me and I suddenly felt my weight go all the way down to my stomach.

"Wait, you're asking me toâ€¦ watch you?"

"Only when I'm otherwise alone," he said. "I can't be out of these meetings, but at the same time, I can't be trusted to be alone."

Thuggory shook his head. "Which is why we need someone to keep a tab on him, and well, you're his oldest friend, so it's not like you didn't have reason toâ€¦."

I gulped. Well, there goes my week. So much for private time with Meatlug. Hopefully she would understandâ€¦ with my not telling her a thing. Or worse, find a nice Gronckle she liked even betterâ€¦ Oh,

why couldn't we just go feasting and singing like everyone else? "Is that all we need to watch out for?"

"Well." Hiccup scratched the back of his neck. "There's Snotlout, but I don't think the King is all too interested in him."

"Why not?" asked Thuggory.

"You honestly expect _Snotlout _of all people to have covert planning and an complex scheming?" Hiccup pointed out.

I shrugged. "He has a point." The idea Snotlout could plan something complicated and not have it mess up was almost as impossible as making metal float. And even if he was being ordered someone else, he'd utterly mess up any plans of subterfuge just by talking about it outloud. As far as potential recruits for spying, Snotlout was in the 'desperate for anything' category.

"Better keep an eye on him, just in caseâ€¦.So, is that it? We done with our list of suspects?"

"Sure!" chirped Camicazi. "That's our list of immediate suspects! Now we have to deal with the other part of our meeting!"

"Wait, there's another part?" I think we were planning discussion about Alvin, but I don't recall if we'd be brought up to the introduction.

Thuggory nodded. "Show him."

Camicazi went off to a corner of the hold and came back holding a large piece of parchment, I recognized the map stolen from Alvin's hideout.

Hiccup helped her unfold it.

"Wait, weren't you supposed to show Dagur this?" I mean, I did spend a week in Alvin's dungeon all because of that mapâ€¦ all because Camicazi wanted to pull a complicated plot.

Camicazi nodded. "And we woulda' done it too, if it weren't for a little problem we found once we got to Dagur."

I frowned. I wasn't there at the meeting where Dagur invited all of the Chiefs and Heirs into one spot. No, just because I had a Chief's son for a friend, that didn't mean anything. "What? What's wrong?"

"Take a look," Camicazi pointed at some of the villages marked on the map, particularly at the names 'Hairy Hooligans', 'Meatheads', and 'Bog Burglars'; they were all underlined numerous times, especially my own Tribe's name. A couple of others were underlined as well. "Notice a pattern?"

I motioned my hand to a different cluster of islands. Murderous was labeled with an underline as well. Traveling Minstrels was crossed out, as was Purple Plums, tribes I have heard that weren't much more than small, weak villages who only survived because they never really fought. Blockheads, Shipwreckers, and a few others were all circled, while even and I think a couple of those names were introduced to us

during the little meet and greet Dagur gaze us. Their patterns confused me a little more, but slowly I began to understand the notation. "Do-do you know what happened to the clans that've been crossed out Camicazi?"

I was hoping she didn't know. She frowned. "The Purple Plums and Traveling Mistrels were all attacked lately, lots of losses especially in plunder; I should know, I saw the aftermath.."

I gazed at the map with a cold shock running through my veins. The map was a warmap. The crossed out clans were all either neutralized or otherwise defenseless, while the underlines represented an enemy, with the moe underlines representing even bigger nuisances. But thenâ€¦ that must mean the circlesâ€¦. I gulped. "They'reâ€¦ they're _allied _with Alvin?" I hoped I was wrong.

The three Heirs all nodded gravely.

"If only I didn't know any better; Heather helped me find that one out a while back," Camicazi didn't sound too happy to speak about it.

Oh, why couldn't I be wrong? That explains where Alvin's been getting all of his extra manpower! He's been recruitingâ€¦. somehow, involving the other clans! I shook my head, a couple of clans were denoted with different things some combination of circles, underlines, or crossing out; the fact that politics change no doubt. "Soâ€¦ if this is Alvin's warmap; what's this all mean?"

"Well, a good fourth of the tribes that have been circled have sent representativesâ€¦." Thuggory didn't make me feel better.

"And since I brought up Alvin's spear," Hiccup commented, making me feel even _worse._

"They're gonna contact Alvin!" I practically felt like breaking out of the ship's hold and swimming all the way back home. That's not all too nice to have. As soon as one of their informants sent word to the Outcasts, the gig was up.

"Well, we have no idea why the encircled tribes are allying with himâ€¦" Thuggory shrugged, as if the problem wasn't a disaster waiting to happen. Which it was.

"Who knows why?" Camicazi chirped, her expression giving me the idea she was thinking up of reasons why a tribe would willingly ally with Alvin the now Monstrous. "Maybe it's a hostage situation where someone important is kidnapped against their will, or maybe there's a big sum of money involvedâ€¦"

"Yeah, maybe, let's hope it's just that," said Hiccup.

I really hated this. If hoping that Alvin's possible allies were there because they were all impassionately allied with Alvin because of some big incentive other than loyalty, then I don't know what we were supposed to do.

"Alvin's got massive claws that can slice _arrows _before they hit him!" I practically shouted. Someone in this room has got to put all the danger into perspective. "He can shred through metal with brute

strength alone, has the ability to mend his wounds, and on top of that, he's got whatever twisted schemes he can come up with! That's not an enemy we can be fighting."

Hiccup nodded. "I know, I know, but still, directly attacking Fort Sinister with all of these Tribes and warriors everywhere is probably not a smart idea, even if he's got a third of the guests as turncoats. No, he's not going to cause us any trouble while we're here" which means he'll probably try to take us on when we leave."

I groaned; why did he have to start with a good reason as to why Alvin isn't going to attack; _then _bring up the situation where he does? "So" we've got to worry about Alvin, the King, and any number of potential spies they might have?"

Thuggory nodded, taking the map and putting it away. "We shoulda kept your mouth shut about the spear."

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "Alvin probably alerted his allies to inform him about Camicazi's whereabouts, after she undermined him by nabbing the spear and his war map. So, us showing the spear might not have caused as much damage as we think it might."

I groaned. There has got to be an easier way. "Why don't we just show Dagur the map and be done with it? Let him decide to do what he wants with the Tribes that signed over to Alvin's side!"

"Because if I know Alvin, and believe me, I know him well enough," Hiccup commented. "The threat of Alvin levying a curse against some of the other tribes might have been all it took for them to join over to his side. Without that staff, Alvin can't carry out that threat" I don't want to punish people just because someone forced them to do wrong."

"And?" Thuggory said.

"And because if we did, well, more honor provings" Hiccup groaned. "I'm sick and tired of those and I know that that's what's gonna happen if we start pointing fingers."

I sighed. That was a dangerous move, one that any unrepentant tribe might take advantage of. "Great, so, we know who our enemies are and we're not taking action against them." Why was it that every Heir, even Hiccup, had to have such suicidally brave tendencies?

Camicazi shrugged. "Well, maybe not now. I'm getting some friends to help comb through and see who's fighting for what"

"And until then, we'll just stay on our toes."

Okay, so, wait a while in the metaphorical dragon's den and hope that you aren't eaten. Well, I did that literally a week ago, how's doing that for pretend for a week any different? Now is there any way this meeting could get possibly worse? "Are" are we done here?" I guess with all the other things to be afraid of, being in the dark wasn't as bad, especially since I had a torch.

"One more thing," Thuggory said.

"Uh, sure, whatever you need." I didn't oppose him.

"Can you please some pretending to be me?" Thuggory said, standing right in front of me, looking me in the eyes.

I almost gave a frightened whimper. What was he talking about?

He shouted at me. "Ever since your little trip to Outcast Island all those months ago, people keep thinking I have blonde hair!"

* * *

><p>I felt so empty now, among theseâ€¦ Herd. I know that's not they were really called, but right now I didn't feel like admitting to myself that I was one of them. How could I, especially with what I have done? I did not feel I deserved to be put into the same category as them and that wasn't me declaring that they were beneath me, either. My crime was not so easily forgiven.<p>

I touched the bronze coating of the hand mirror and wondered to myself how long I could stand lying to myselfâ€¦ and to the world. Right now, the Herd saw a young woman of their own, not fully an adult, but not merely a child either. With red hair, and choice of tunic and skirt, my appearance was completely normal, if a little more neat than what most girls my apparent age would have had.

Yet, as I touched the pendant around my neck, I wondered to myself, dare I show my face to the world? My true appearance, with blue scales and yellow membranes for wings? It has been a while since I displayed my crest of spines or hurled venomous spikes at anything. I was a Nadder, one of the Kin and yet why did I feel so ashamed of being who I truly was? It was like, I wish the old me died a long time ago...

I sighed. Our visit to Fort Sinister was stressful to all of my former Peers, except Toothless and Hookfang, for reasons that I don't care to think of, not when there are more important things to focus on; important and distracting things. Such as watching a fight.

As I approached the stage of what appeared to be some sort of fighting place, I put my mirror away in my satchel. Now wasn't the time for quiet contemplating, no, I had an important thing to watch out for.

I cheered and roared, my enthusiasm burying my shame. I found it so easy to get lost with the crowd, watching two men grapple and jab at each other.

The arena set before us was a simple set up of wooden platforms raised above the ground. It wasn't too spacious, nor was it too crowded, but just enough for someone to easily get tossed out of the ringâ€¦ like right now.

"Gwaaoooh!" a man shouted as he was flung out of the ring from a hard tackle from his opponent. He landed not too far away from me, his head practically within spitting distance of me. He was lucky that there were hay bales to break his face. "Goahâ€¦" he groaned.

DING! A pot clanged as its owner, a man who sat at a table not too far away from the ring, hit it with a wooden spoon. "Good show!" he

said, lifting his helmet in some sort of courteous gesture to the victor.

The winner bowed, then stepped down gracefully and then went on to pick up the fallen man.

"So, Knuckle Cracker and Fishyear, you're up!" the man at the table read from a list. Two men, apparently Knuckle Cracker and Fishyear went onto the platform. Then, at the sound of the pot clanging again, they began their fight.

Finding myself drawn to the fighting, I went and turned to the man at the table. "Excuse me, what is this?"

The man turned to me, but still kept an eye onto the fighting. He was an older, lightly bearded man with blueish eyes. "Well, Miss, this is just a little bit of a friendly competition, some friendly jabs, no weapons stuff. Two people walk in, one walks out. The other is thrown out! Like now!" He laughed. It was at this point, the skinnier of the two as flung onto the hay bales.

DING! The pot rang again. The skinnier man on the hay bales went back onto the platform. Apparently there were multiple rounds of combat.

"Round two! Fight!" declared the organizer. DING! He hit the pot and the two men went after each other again.

I was intrigued by the promise of a fight. It's been a far too long since I had a proper fight and not mere practice. I was itching for adrenaline to run through my veins; I wanted to keep my skills sharp. Besides, this outfit wasn't one of my best ones; I could afford to get it roughed up a bit; I needed to relieve my stress. "Hm, mind if I sign up?"

"Ooh! Ooh! Did you see that?" the organizer said, seemingly ignoring my request.

I turned to see what was distracting him and when I did, I gave a gasp, "Ooh, is that a neck hold!?"

"Sure is!" This round of the fight was nearing its end as the skinnier of the two managed to swing around to the larger man's back. The larger man was trying to throw him off, but it didn't work. Instead he was brought to the ground and kept there for a good solid minute. The organizer had to ring his pot again for it break up the lock. "Okay, next round."

The crowd all gave relieved gasps, mimicking the ones the larger man did.

"Ooh, that's gotta hurt." I said. It was messy fighting, but I could put up with a little untidiness. I needed a good excuse to butt heads in.

_DING! _The organizer rang his pot. "Round Three! Fight!"

The men fought again, but this time the energy from them was drained. The crowd too didn't feel like supporting the two of them.

"So, you going to let me fight?" I really hoped he wasn't denying me on count I was a girl. I know I had enough of that kind of dismissal when I was training to be a Squire.

"Sure, sure, what's your name, Miss?" The man said impassionately.

"Stormflyâ€|" The words came

"Stormfly? What kinda' name is that?" the organizer scratched his head a little.

"Mine." I felt my cheeks flush red. Out of everyone of my friends, my name was the odd one out, being a littleâ€| specific to say, having wings. Hookfang at least had the excuse that Vikings sometimes had abnormally long teeth, and Meatlug, well, she had gotten one that fit in with their naming conventions.

It was at this point that one of the two men, the large of the two slipped and fell on the hay bales. The crowd gave the two of them the last cheers they had for them, breaking into a minor uproar.

The organizer shrugged. "Whatever I guessâ€|" DING! He clanged his pot again. "Good show!" he declared. Both the smaller and the large men left after that. The organizer then turned and looked at me and pointed up there. "I've got this contestant who's been itching to go up."

I nodded and stepped onto the wooden platform.

"And there goes Stormfly, this young lady just signed up with her odd name and everything. Let's see what she's made off!" shouted the organizer.

I gave them all a big grin. It felt so easy to be on stage, though I still felt my guilt at the very pit of my heart. Still, I could bury it, put on a show that I didn't mind.

"And our next contestant is none other than Camicazi! You all know her and probably lost your coin purses to her once or twice!"

I blinked, a sudden shock ofâ€| something unheard of running up my spine. I was _fighting Camicazi! _

Camicazi came up just shortly after, looking like I how I felt. She didn't say anything just yet, which was fine since I lacked an idea what I would say to her.

"We've got something special for you folks, these two young ladies are going to see who's the better fighter out of them!" the organizer yelled. The crowd murmured mixed sorts of responses, but the organizer didn't give them time to sort things out. "Round One! Fight!" _Ding! _The bell clanged.

Camicazi and I looked at each other for another second before combat reflexes kicked in for both of us. I went in with a foot. Camicazi ducked under the kick and gave a short jab into my rib cage. I gritted my teeth and lunged forward, both arms raised in the air.

"What'cha doing!?" Camicazi shouted. She sidestep my assault closed in on an arc. Camicazi then kicked me on the rear and would have almost sent me to the ground, if I didn't adjust my footing to turn my descent into horizontal movement.

It wasn't until just then that I realized that I was using my Nadder fighting style in a body not used to it. I think I should probably talk to Astrid about more fist fighting, I haven't done so well on that.

While I was off being distracted, Camicazi went for a sweep with her thigh, setting me off balance yet again. Unfortunately, for me, I wasn't given a chance to a recover. I felt her body slam right into mine, knocking me down and off the arena.

_Ding! _"Round one goes to Camicazi!" I heard the crowd cheer for her.

I groaned. Okay, not to self, don't think like a dragon for this.

"Ha! I've been waiting to do that one since winter!" laughed Camicazi. Whatever that meant, I didn't really care.

I picked myself up and off the hay bales and walked right back to the arena. "Oh, so that's how it's gonna be?" I gritted my teeth. "Well, prepare to go down, _girl!" _

"Bring it!" Camicazi lifted both fists up to to a guard. "I'm waiting.

"Round Two! Fight!" _Ding!_

Like last time I went with the first attack, unlike last time, my first kick was a fake out.

Camicazi pulled the same trick twice and I redirected my and got her on the knees.

She fell to the ground, but didn't have much far to fall since she tried to duck under me. No matter, I took advantage of that. I raised my heel and brought it crashing down to Camicazi's body, putting as much weight as I could.

But Camicazi pushed herself out of the way, evading my stomp. "Ha! You've got big stompy feet, don'cha?" She laughed as she stood out of my reach.

I showed her my teeth and they probably shone bright and pearl white. "Yes, I do!" She wasn't talking about my somewhat dainty human legs.

The crowd was in an uproar, this round was getting heated compared to the minor confusion of the last what.

Camicazi went in for another attack, a quick one-two punch that I just barely guarded. "Oh, you're getting good, but you've still got alot to learn!" She then almost followed up with an over head attack, but I knew better than to give her the chance.

I ducked my head under the blow and went for a hard push on her abdominal region, a nice and relatively unguarded location. "Not _that much!" _I countered, canceling her attack. Then, I grabbed the Bog Burglar by her _other arm _and threw her to the side.

She landed into the pile of hay, much like I did, only face first. She got up a moment later, spitting out some

_Ding! _"And the winner of this round is newcomer Stormfly!"

The crowd roared and cheered my name. "Stormfly! Stormfly!"

I gave them all a little wave, just to show them I was here and accepting of their cheers. Oh, how long have I waited to hear the praise of the publicâ€¦ even ifâ€¦ No, I couldn't bear itâ€¦ Suddenly, I pulled myself out of accepting their cheers, their noise sounding almost horrifying to my ears.

My frown remained until Camicazi stood back onto the arena. "Hm, something bothering you?" She panted a little, a little wave of exhaustion visible in her eyes. I was much the same way, maybe a little more pained, but less weary.

I cringed a little bit. "Sorta." Same thing that's been bothering most of us who served under the King and Flight Commander One Eye; it was the sort of 'sorta' that did not bear mentioning in public.

Camicazi mused. "Hm, you know there's beenâ€¦ sorta something buggin me lately."

"Really?"

She grinned. "And that's why I'm venting!"

Hm, that was a good idea.

_Ding! _"Round Three! Fight!" the announcer shouted.

We both went at each other this time. Camicazi went for a punch to counter my kick. She used her other arm to deflect my strike, leaving a small amount of pain on my lower leg.

She went in further, pressing her punch forward and there was little else I could do to block it given my other leg was still in the air. But I did what I could and evaded the blow by allowing myself to fall, causing her jab to miss completely. "Missed!" I taunted. Then I spun myself and rolled onto my chest to evade Camicazi throwing her entire body at me. "Missed again!"

I took the time to stand up right after that.

"Ha, no I didn't!" She kicked my leg just as I was about to put my weight down and stabilize myself and nearly sent me toppling again. She used this opportunity to get herself standing and I just barely managed to avoid getting myself thrown up and out of the ring.

"Hey, you're messing up my clothes!" I laughed, joking a little. Oh, Camicazi was a fun adversary, especially with the banter going back and forth between us.

"Oh, pashaw!" she snorted. "We stuffed that wardrobe of your didn't we!?"

"You never got me a dresser!" I pointed at her accusingly.

The audience stoppped cheering, getting a little lost. But still they were still trying their best to follow our leaps of logic.

Camicazi grunted. "Well, fine, beat me and I'll buy you a wardrobe!"

"Oh, as if I needed more incentive to bring you down!" I threw myself at the girl. This time I arced my attacks low to avoid them from being thrown off. But Camicazi leapt over my sweep.

"You gotta do better than that!"

The crowd went back to an uproar, now that the action started again.

She jabbed at me three times but I was able to block each one, then I retaliated with strikes of my own.

We were both learning from each other's tactics, developing quick countermeasures and adapting our styles to better attack our enemyâ€| which really meant we were gradually getting worse at _proper fighting _and just started doing random things.

There was only one thing I knew to do to finish this, one last grapple. I threw myself at Camicazi, this time catching her off guard and grabbing onto her body.

Then with a mighty roar and with a swing of my body I tried to throw her off the arena againâ€| except this time, Camicazi was ready.

As I grabbed onto her, she grabbed onto me. "Well, looks like there's only one way to end this!" She threw herself , quite frankly aiding me in me throwing her, but in doing so, she also dragged me along with her.

We both flew and landed on the hay bales, brought of us coughed up straw.

_Ding! _"And the winner isâ€| uhâ€|. no oneâ€| imagine thatâ€|. Well, good show girlsâ€|"

The crowd was in a great uproar, each person congratulating us on our fighting ability and with how evenly matched and intense the fight had been. To be honest, it wasn't so much as intense for, as much as it was a little exercise in venting.

Camicazi was the first to get out. She dusted herself of straw and offered me a hand, laughing all the while.

"Well, looks like I'm not getting that wardrobe," I groaned I dusted myself of hay as well; being dirty was fine while in a fight, but afterwards, one needed to take care for proper hygiene.

"Hm, maybe?" she smiled, walking us both in the direction off of the

arena. Two more replacement fighters went up. "Maybe if you tell me about what's been bugging you lot. I mean, it's plainly obvious there's been something you guys have been worried about since we've arrived on Fort Sinister."

I sighed. I really didn't want to go talk about it. Not right now. It was important sure, but it was a private issue for those in the know... So, I decided to make up a random question to get her off my back. Answer a question for a question, right? "Well, first, can you tell me what's up with the winter? I mean, you've been waiting for what exactly?"

Camicazi beamed red as if her skin was scalded hot. "Well, maybe it can wait thenâ€|"

"Sureâ€|"That question hit a nerve, and I only really wanted to delay it for a while.

I sighed. Maybe a different, more important question.

Then a brilliant idea lit up in my head. "Hm, want to go again?"

Camicazi's grin was particularly intrigued.

* * *

><p>Thought I'd give some attention to characters who weren't Hiccup and Toothless this time around. Something simple, something basic, you know. Some plot points to focus on, and hint at the things that's been bothering Stormfly and the others. You probably know what it's about.

36. Chapter 36

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****So, earlier I planned to make last part into three chapters, but I decided against it. Either way, I managed to get this chapter up and running, though I did have to struggle against a cold to get this out on time. ****

****Either way, please Read and ****Review****

****In the last chapter, we had some side stuff, but here, we get to focus on some plot development.****

* * *

><p>I yawned, weariness overtaking me and clouding my vision. Yet, no matter how tired I got, I knew I couldn't sleep, not so long as I kept watching that horrible dream. I stared out at the windows, wondering how long it was going to be before dawn showed up. Maybe then I would be tired enough that I could sleep without dreaming.<p>

"Snotlout?" I heard a voice from behind me. Foot steps approached, getting louder with every step. I already knew who it was, the voice

someone's I had gotten so used to hearing.

"Hookfang," I muttered under my breath. Why wasn't he still in bed? Did he see me leave the room? I shook my head and sucked up my weariness. There was no way I was going to let him see me like this; I needed to actâ€¦ normalâ€¦ for me that is. I turned around. " Hey, there Hookfang, what brings you up so late?"

Hookfang gave me a weary look and yawned. "Oh, I was justâ€¦ thinking."

One of my eyes perked up. "About what?"

He shrugged. "Toothless and I, welll, we've been wondering at what's been eating-"

I immediately shook my head and wave my arms around. I did not want him to finish that sentence. "What, about me? No, nothng's been eating at me! Nope!"

Hookfang's eyebrows rose. "Uh, what?"

"You heard me!" I pointed at myself. "Do I look like I'm trying to hide something?"

I saw his head tilt for a moment. "Uhâ€¦ okayâ€¦."

"Perfect!" I said. Good just so long as he doesn't suspect at the reason of why I am staying up so late. I mean, sure my younger cousin probably would need more convincing, but Hookfang was more important to me right now.

"Butâ€¦ that's not what Toothless and I were talking about, my liege."

I tried to give him my best smile. Okay, maybe I'm going a little overboard. I haven't had much sleep forâ€¦ three days was it? "Uh... great, perfect!" I replied. "So, what was it?"

He shrugged. "Well, it's been something that's been on our minds for the past few days." He pointed down the hallway and in the direction of the former dungeons, where our rooms were all in. "Well, you know about our friends right? Aboutâ€¦ where we come from"

"Yeah, I know," I nodded. Though I still didn't see what he meant. "What about it?"

"Well, well, something's been bugging them for the past few days."

I frowned. I guess with all of my worrying and sleepless nights, I never really paid much attention to _other people _having issues. "So, what's been bugging them?"

Hookfang shrugged. "I dunno. Toothless and me have been watching them on and off, and well, they've been actingâ€¦ worried, sometimes a little hesitant, or spacing out." He shook his head. "We're hoping it's not because one of them is that spy we've heard getting talked about so much."

I cringed hard. I wish Mildew didn't speak that night three days ago.

I wish he never brought mention of the spy, of that there was a traitor working for the King, the Red Death. I hated the very idea, the thought that there was a traitor in my midst. Worst part was, my nightmares were all about it. Never in my whole life have I hoped that I wasso dead _wrong_

"Snotlout? My liege?" Hookfang waved a hand back in forth in front of me. "Are you in there?"

I slapped it away in reflex. "Hey, don't do that!"

Hookfang gave me a little bit of a smirk, as if a little laugh was struggling to escape his lips. "Yeah, I know, but it's rare enough to see you think that I sometimes wonder if you'd ever stop if you ever really got started!"

I rolled my eyes. Clearly, someone's been taking lessons from one of my cousins in being snide. "Har! Har!" I gave in a little mocking tone, but then I shown him my teeth. "You're lucky I don't care about things like that!"

He struggled to contain a little bit of laughter. "Of course, not my leige, such things areâ€| beneath you."

I slapped him on the back. "Darn right I don't!" I'll admit, meeting Hookfang was one of the better things that happened to me; at least he understood meâ€|. if he was a little insubordinate at times.

And then Hookfang's eyes lit up, catching something in his gaze. The taller boy took my by the arm and darted off until we were behind one of the larger statues of great Viking heroes commissioned to decorate the place.

"Hey, watch it!" I struggled to break free, but Hookfang had a surprisingly tight grip for someone who was lean and never really used hands until last winter. But as I tried to talk to him again, his hand went over my mouth. Worse, his body was pressed firmly against me, keeping me locked in place.

"Ssh! Quiet!" Hookfang raise a hand over to his lips, the 'shush' gesture. His head then went to the side and peaked out, watching at whatever caused him to jump me.

I didn't see what was happening, but I kept trying to speak through my trapped lips. I could hear footsteps, someone was approaching down the hallway. I struggled to get a look at the new comer, whoever it was that had Hookfang so spooked. I finally managed to get a look at him, just about the same time as I managed to get my mouth free from Hookfang's hands. "Hey is that Milde-

"He'll see us." I heard Hookfang mutter. He then jerked my head back against the wall with a great big tug.

"Ow!" I yelped, clutching my head by my hand. Thor, how I wished my skull could break rock again.

"Sorry!" Hookfang ducked his head close to mine, just in time for us to see Mildew pass us by.

Neither Hookfang nor I spoke a word as the man passed our hiding

spot. Then, as a result, he didn't turn his gaze and the old man didn't seem to notice us in the least. He kept moving down the hall, muttering and cursing to himself along the way, none the wiser.

There was a long silence, as Hookfang and I watched the man disappear into the darkness. Hookfang gave a sigh of relief once he was gone. "Okay, that was too close for comfort!"

But instead of being relieved, I felt upset, angry even. "Are you kidding? We should have got back at him, then and there!" I wanted to jump the old man and, I don't know, do something to him. Either that or take his staff from him!

"Snotlout," cringed Hookfang. "Now's not a good time to go and play pranks on people, besides, he's got powers of his own!"

I stared firm and hard into my friends eyes. "I know that!" I spat. "But I want to make him pay." I wasn't there when he told all of the Chiefs there was a traitor in our midst, but if I was there, I would have shut him up by stuffing his mouth with a whole feat if I could. He's the reason I couldn't sleep at night!

I dashed off after the old man, the intention of doing something to him; I hadn't worked out all yet, but I was sure going to do more than scare his sheep and disorganize his toolshed. If nothing else, I wanted to know how he knew.

"Snotlout!" I heard Hookfang shout behind me, barely louder than a whisper at the rate I went.

I ran towards where I saw Mildew heading, down the end of the hallway. There the old man stood, his gaze fixated on the wall, staff in hand. I slowed my pace as I approached. I didn't want him noticing me until I was right up in his face. I crept ever closer, my pulse quickening as my hands felt ready to act. A simple take down, grabbing him by wrist should be more than enough to face such a decrepit foe, right?

But it was all for nought. I felt my body get pulled backwards for the second time today. I fell and tumbled onto the stony floor of another nearby hallway. "What do you think you're doing!?" I almost shouted at Hookfang. The only thing keeping me from raising my voice even more was that I wanted to make sure Mildew was going to end up right in my hands. "I had him!"

"Please, don't do this my liege!" Hookfang beamed at me. "He's going to cause us more problems!"

"Well, I was going to make him less of a problem!" Maybe if I took away his new staff heh, that could work. I went to stand up but Hookfang's grip was enough to keep me from moving forward for a time. There was no way he had the strength to hold, me but it certainly slowed me down. "Just let me go."

Hookfang cringed. "I'm sorry, Snotlout, but I can't let you-"

And then we both heard a strange grinding noise, like gravel grinding against gravel. I stopped moving for a moment, wondering where that low sound came from. It was nearby but unless.

In a moment of weakness caused by the curiosity, Hookfang's grip on me wavered. I broke free with a dash and went back to the hall way. Except when I was there, Mildew was no where to be seen. My eyes widened. What happened? "Where did he go?"

Hookfang approached me and I grabbed him by the shirt and shook him wildly. "I almost had him, he was right there and then! Gah!" I let go and began frantically searching the wall.

"I'm sorry Snotlout, but Iâ€¦I think he knows...everything." I didn't pay much attention to Hookfang, since I was much too upset at him. So who cares if he knew some important mumbo jumbo, had the power to make staves the shot out lightning, or whatever? Well, I did, and that's why I wanted to pummel him.

"Just help me look for him!" I snarled back. Maybe if Hookfang helped me find him, I could forget about his making me lose Mildew! I kept touching the wall, wondering if there was maybe some sort of secret switch hidden in the bricks or somethingâ€¦ I mean, he can't just turn invisible can he? There had to be a secret door, I mean, I heard stone move, that's what those crazy Viking tomb builders did sometimes, right?

"Snotlout, I don't think he wants us to follow him."

"Well, duh of course not!" I said. Stupid secret door getting my way. "Why won't you open?" I said, pummeling the stone with my fist. It shouldn't hurt, I've bloodied my knuckles several times before and I was fine. Except I wasn't. A bolt of electricity, like that jolt I felt when I wear all wool clothing arced up my arm, sending all sorts of pain signals to flare up. "Yow!" I yelp.

But as I stood there, a the bricks in the wall seemed to roll away, forming a passage that led down into the earth. That was where Mildew lay. "Uh what did you you do?" questioned Hookfang.

I smirked. The pain was worth it. "Be awesome! Now you coming or what?"

Hookfang gave a questioning look. "I dunno, I just don't want you to, well, get hurt."

I snort. "Don't worry so much." I pointed at myself. "I'm right here! Where's your sense of adventure?"

"I don't have oneâ€¦"

"Pft! Well, remind me to get you one then!" I took Hookfang by the hand and stepped over the threshold and thenâ€¦

"Snotlout?" I heard Hookfang. I also felt him poke at my ribs. "Are you okay?"

I shook my head, reeling myself in from that strange, eerie sensation. "Didâ€¦ you feel that?"

"Feel what?" Hookfang tilted his head.

"You didn't...?" I don't know how Hookfang didn't feel it. It was

this weird, almost freezing sensation, like someone combined an all encompassing dread with a firm command of telling a trespasser to go away. At least, that's what I felt it was. There was also a weird shivering sensation that I felt almost froze my spine.

"Maybe we should turn back? We're still at the entr..." As soon as Hookfang said those words, our way out shut itself in. "Uh... maybe after you open the entrance again."

I shook my head. No, I didn't want to back out now. I needed to make sure a certain someone realized what I was doing. "Not yet." I took a step forward.

There was no visible light sources for which to speak of, yet for some reason, the entire stairway almost seemed to be outlined in a faint glow, enough that we could see our steps and several feet forward in the darkness. We were also very aware of the sheer amount of dust and cobwebs that were present everywhere. The smell was like something died down there' wherever this place was, no one has been cleaning it for a long time. And here I thought my room was messed up.

"This is a bad idea." I heard Hookfang mutter.

I shrugged. "Well, apparently bad ideas run in the family."

We eventually made it down the stairway into a place that seemed to be some sort of private room. It wasn't too big, not too small. I think it might have been someone's study at one point. Most notably, there were a bunch of overturned and busted up bookshelves. If there had been anything of value in them, the spiderwebs that covered them made it hard to tell if anything survived.

Mildew was off at a corner in the room, muttering to himself as he rifled through one of the fallen pieces of furniture. His back was turned to the entrance of this room, so again, there was able opportunity for me to sneak over.

Hookfang silently pleaded at me, not even daring to whisper. I did have the daring to move forward, where my friend

"Rotten, stupid dragons!" Mildew cursed; though I had no idea what dragon had anything to do with this secret space. He was trying to heave up one of the bookshelves off of something big. I don't know what it was but there was a slight glint on the floor. I had to admit though, Mildew sure had surprising strength.

That didn't mean anything to me and I kept moving forward. I decided that with the old man not paying attention, maybe I could take his staff and break it, especially if it was like his last one. I mean, I was brave, not stupid; no way am I letting him keep a staff that shot lightning out both ends. I crept closer just until I was in spitting distance of the stick.

That was when Mildew managed to slide off the bookshelf over whatever it was he wanted. I heard him make gleeful noise. "Ha! Ha! There we go!" He lifted it up and I saw it was a helmet, though it clearly wasn't made of iron and had this weird headdress that looked like someone glued a brush on the head and chewed off the bristles. I think it was bronze... maybe? "So, now that I have you, are you

willing to talk?"

I didn't move, mostly out of confusion. Was Mildew talking to that thing? My mild confusion however was short lived; something far, far weirder happened. Two white-blue pinpricks of light blazed where the eyes once were and then I heard a voice, one cold, dark, and raspy. _"Yes..."_ The helmet was _talking back. _

"Good." Mildew didn't seem the least bit surprised. "Now then, tell me, what's the first problem we should remove? Things have been going downhill ever since..."

I stopped paying attention to Mildew at that point, not wanting to hear more of him. Instead, I was fixated on the two glowing lights for eyes the helmet had. At first they were focused on Mildew, but with every beating of my heart, the lights moved until they I noticed they were facing me.

I gulped and I suddenly realized that maybe I could afford to be a little cowardly. I took off in a sprint as fast as I could. No way, no how was I going to find out more of what that skull was.

Hookfang once he saw me dash, made a break for it himself, climbing up the stairs with a slow heaving step.

But Mildew caught on to us. "Wait, who goes there?" I heard him shout, his voice echoing and growing fainter as my best friend and I climbed up.

There was a loud thunder clap and a bright flash that happened right behind us; Mildew's new staff blasted lightning for sure. "I told you this was a bad idea!" yelled Hookfang, sprinting just ahead of me. "Now he knows we're here!"

"And if you let me just take his staff the first time around, we wouldn't be in this mess!" I replied.

Mildew kept blasting lighting behind us, his shots wild. The darkness was our only protection in this place, keeping the old man from getting a hit. I really wished my little protection talisman worked against lightning right about now.

We kept running up the steps, still managing to outpace a man with bad aim and slow movements, but that wasn't much comfort as we both came to realize one important thing at the end. "Where is it!?" Hookfang panicked, touching the wall in frantic motions. The entrance was still sealed, meaning if we didn't find it in time, Mildew was likely to fry us.

"How should I know! I'm not a know-it-all!" I replied, floundering about and randomly touching stones. I don't know what I did, it just happened that time. Now I really wish I knew how to open it again.

"Whoever you are, I'm going to zap you until you're a crisp!" yelled Mildew, still not visible through the blackness, not even with his lightning illuminating the room for a brief flash. We still heard him though make cautious steps.

Blast. "Why won't you open?" I was about to strike the wall with my

fist but the stones parted before they could lack. I almost lost my balance in the sudden release, and nearly fell to the ground.

Hookfang though grabbed onto my hand and pulled me forward while taking off in a sprint. That was enough to help me get back into an upright dash. "I don't know what you did, but I can't complain!"

I gave my friend a stiff smile. "Less thanking, more running!" Boy, I am so glad my Dad isn't here to hear me say that; that'd be embarrassing.

"Here!" Hookfang pointed off to the corner hallway we hid in earlier. We headed behind that hallway and for even better measure we hid around a statue with in that hallway that was covered with a hefty dose of darkness.

Mildew stopped blasting lightning when we got outside, but he still kept searching for us as he made his way out of theâ€| whatever that room was. His eyes scanned left and right, turning his attention to our hallway, scowling. "Blast!" He still had the bronze helmet on him and lifted it up until it was eye level with him. "Did you see them?"

The faint lights were still easily visible and that strange, unsettling voice spoke through the helmet. _"Noâ€|"_

Mildew scowled. "It must have been that spy then, going off to report to his or her master."

The voice said nothing, thankfully.

Mildew and that creepy helmet then left.

Hookfang and I stopped holding my breath once I was sure they were gone. "Soâ€| what's with that helmet?" Hookfang asked, still sounding a little disturbed. "I mean, why's he talking to it?"

I shrugged. I didn't want to think about it too hard. "Beats me. Probably because it answers back."

Hookfang gave me a look. "That helmetâ€| talks back?" He sounded so genuine, I couldn't believe it.

"Youâ€| didn't hear it?" I paused.

Hookfang frowned.

I couldn't believe him. That voice was so clear to me, even from this far away. Why didn't my best friend know about it? Was it all just in my head?

I shook my head. "Justâ€| forget it." The less said about that helmet the better. Why Mildew go through the trouble of getting it was nothing I cared to know.

* * *

><p>I have finally had enough. What's been bothering me for the past few days had finally reached the point of being so unbearable, I

couldn't stand it anymore. I turned myself completely around and faced Fishlegs right in the eye. "Look, I know I asked you to keep an eye on me, but do you really have to follow me everywhere?"

Fishlegs, my old friend, was busy trying to pretend that the sign post right in front of him was bigger than he pretended not to be noticed, hiding his head behind the signpost.

I sighed. People from all over the Barbaric Archipelago were starting to look at us; I didn't need more weirdness on my already absurd reputation listing. "Okay, Fishlegs, I know you're there."

Fishlegs still didn't budge.

"Hiding behind the sign post," I added.

Fishlegs still didn't leave his post, but at least began to twitch.

Okay, time for the big guns. "Fishlegs, you're not wearing any clothes!"

Fishlegs jumped out of his post and tried to cover himself in frantic shame only to realize I was bluffing. He turned red either way. "Oh great, now I gotta hide again!" he said, looking at me with that look in his eyes. "So, mind if we pretend you didn't see me?"

"Before you do, I recommend taking lessons from Camicazi." Really, hiding behind a post was terrible hiding spot, but I had to admit, it wasn't his worst. I mean, seriously yesterday he was walking behind me dressed up in black in the middle of broad daylight and that won us both so many stares, the only reason I didn't call attention to it was because the only person it seemed to fool was Dagur. Still, it was just slightly above terrible, and that wasn't good either.

"But then who'd keep an eye out on you?"

I rolled my eyes. That's not how it worked. "You don't have to watch me wherever I go," I replied. I know I asked him to watch me and make sure I wasn't secretly the traitor and all, but Fishlegs went up and beyond the normal limits. The guy somehow manage to drill a hole into my room just to keep watch on me. especially during especially private moments. Really, for someone who doesn't want to keep watch on me, Fishlegs can get quite extreme on the lengths he'd go to.

"But that's what you'd say if you don't watch me to watch out if you were-" I gave Fishlegs a stern look. We were out in public and several people were already paying attention to us due to Fishlegs "-If you were in trouble."

I nodded. "Look, let's just deal with this later." We did have to go to that meeting today, a small status update on Camicazi's ship.

"Right." Fishlegs frowned but approached.

I led the way. Fishlegs kept following me, thankfully not pretending to secretly spy on me. We didn't seem to be followed, as was usual. At best, I assume that anyone who was looking at me was thinking I was heading back to my ship to get something. Which was technically true, Toothless and I did leave a couple of extra things on our ship, but the meeting held the first priority.

For the past three days, I've been having talks with Dagur over how to set up the assault. Or at least tried to, Dagur was kind of unconcerned about strategy and planning beyond focusing on getting as big as fleet as possible. At the very least, I managed to convince him that arming ships with ballistae or trebuchets was the way to go, instead of focusing on a full-out infantry rush. Ranged tactics were something that Dagur needed, especially since our enemy can fly and knew how to use it. I just hoped that whatever I was planning, the Red Death was not the only pulling the strings.

Fishlegs and I arrived at Camicazi's ship not a minute longer. As far as I was aware, no one was really paying attention to us as we descended into the hold.

As usual, I was late, though this time I had good reason. "Okay, look, Fishlegs, please don't follow me everywhere. There's things I have to do alone." Like use the outhouse or bathe.

"But that's what'd you tell me if you were planning on doing something!" Fishlegs replied. "I'm just making sure you're not up to no good."

I slapped myself in the face. Why did he have to be so dedicated over this of all things? Was this payback? "Just try to hide better." Or preferably not hide at all.

Camicazi and Thuggory gave each other glances. It was going to be one of these mornings wasn't it?

"So?" Camicazi began. "How's Toothless?"

I shrugged. "He's fine. Doesn't know that we're all watching I think, but other than spending more time than normal with the other dragons, not much has changed." I wonder if he was doing his own investigation, worrying about if some of his friends were the traitor all along.

"And Stormfly?" she questioned.

I blinked "Uh isn't it your job to watch Stormfly?"

"And Astrid," she confirmed. "But I can't watch them both all the time can I? So, how is she?"

Thuggory, Fishlegs and I all silently traded looks. Was there any particular reason that Camicazi was fixated on Stormfly? I mean, I got she named Stormfly Stormfly and had a good friendship with her, but still, every day for the past three days, Camicazi's been asking about her. "Well, she's fine, outside of that weird case of jitters that she and the other dragons have, but they've all been getting better for the past few days."

"Well, in that case, I haven't seen either her nor Astrid up to any

shenanigans either!" she chirped.

Thuggory nodded in approval. "Well, I've seen Toothless once or twice, and I can confirm he hasn't done anything too unusual except blowing up buildings the other night."

"And that was done to show everyone who didn't already know that he means business." Which was both good and bad. Good because it meant people were starting to take us seriously, bad because being taken seriously means a bigger target on my head.

Thuggory nodded. "And as for the twins and their Zippleback, well, I just know they're up to no good!"

"But that's like all da time!" Camicazi stated.

I confirmed. "Yeah, you're probably better off worrying about the cases for when they're not causing any problems. Then you know things are going badly. I peered over at Fishlegs's writing things down on his notepad. On it there was a check list listing our primary suspects, most of which had already been covered in today's breifing. "So let's see, what about Meatlug?"

"With Astrid and Stormfly." Camicazi shrugged. "Though I don't know how much trouble they'll get to in a clothing store."

Fishlegs blushed. I think we both knew where this was going.

"And then wait, has anyone seen Snotlout and Hookfang?" I see my cousin and his best friend every morning but I don't think anyone ever bothered to really focus on them. I mean, I did say they were the least likely of anyone the King would like to use as an agent, but then again, I could be wrong. There was something about my father's side of the family that was strange about us, Snotlout likely had the same questions.

And sure enough, Camicazi, Fishlegsn, and Thuggory all shook their heads. At that moment, a chill went up my spine. What if Snotlout or Hookfang were chosen to be cover agents because of how unlikely it seemed for them to be used, what then?

"We may want to go have a look at them, just in case."

Emotions flashed on Thuggory's and Camicazi's faces. They realized what I did too.

"But-but, does anyone know where they are?" Fishlegs yelped. "It's a big island, they could be anywhere at the moment!"

"Wait, did anyone see them for breakfast today?" Thuggory suggested.

I pursed my lips. Now that I thought about it, I hadn't seen either of them this morning either.

That could be good or bad. They might have been up to no good ever since midnight and none of us knew what too late. Alternatively, it might mean something else, something good for the four of us. "Camicazi, do you have a look pick?"

The Bog Burglar slipped her hand into her coat pulled out a dozen.
"What'cha have in mind?"

"I think I know where they might be."

I led the other three back to the dungeons that hadn't been dungeons in over two hundred years. Camicazi and Thuggory were the only ones to follow me, since Fishlegs proved to be too slow. So I told him where to meet up afterward, since it was likely we weren't going to spend long with Snotlout or Hookfang, assuming they were still there.

We stopped right at Snotlout's door, all three of us ready to enter. At this hour the dungeons were mostly silent except for a few caretakers who were cleaning up after the morning meals. I snagged some leftover bread in a basket just in case. "Okay, so, I think they might be inside." I knocked the door.

"Areâ€| you sure about that?" Thuggory guessed.

"Positive!" It's a little bit of a well known fact that Hookfang liked to sleep in when he could afford to. As a result, Snotlout had to either spend time waking him up or just leave him for another hour, though lately, I think my cousin has started to wake up later from time to time.

We waited a few moments, and nothing happened. No stirring, no noise, the exact opposite I've come to expect from my cousin.

"They might not be in there," Thuggory suggested.

"Or not bothering to answer." Camicazi shrugged. "Want me to go in? I can have it open ina jiffy!"

"Not just yet." I knocked one more time.

Still no reply.

I really hope it was just Snotlout being lazy in the morning today, I really did.

But since nothing was happening, I was worried the worst might have happened. Either they were the spiesâ€| or the spy might have gotten to them. I couldn't wait any longer "Alright, go in."

And in about the same amount of time as I said it, Camicazi had the door open and kicked it wide open.

And then, she ducked under the wide arcing swing of a blade, just as it was about to strike. Snotlout approached, sword in hand, his face beady eyed and a scream in his throat. "Yah!" he bellowed, sounding every bit like a maddened warrior.

In that split second, Camicazi unfastened her own blade and went for an attack. "Oh, you want a piece of me, you overgrown lout! Come an get it!"

Snotlout parried with an aggressive swing, and then went to slice on throat.

Then, Thuggory leapt into the fray, drawing his sword to contest Snotlout's, screaming just as loud as my cousin was.

Then Snotlout threw back Thuggory a few paces, but not far enough for him to drop his guard.

The fight had then settled into a stand off, two Heirs to one in line for an Heir. The one who made the quickest, swiftest act would decide the fate of the battle.

And yet, through all that, Dagur's servants didn't seem to care that that in the least. I would have thought that one of them would have screamed, ran away, and called some guards to end the fighting, but no, they just kept cleaning the mess breakfast leftover.

I shook my head. No, focus on the fact if you don't intervene no Hiccup, someone you know was going to get cut. I decided to step in between the line of fire between the three swordsmen, well two and a swordwoman. swordgirl? Technicalities. I stood between the three of them, armed with only the crazy idea I could stop them from cutting each other down. "Okay, so good show, uh, can we put away the swords now?"

Thuggory and Camicazi both made faces, neither of them were pleased.

Snotlout tilted his head sideways.. Now that I closer look at him, I could see his eyes were bloodshot red on top of looking quite weary. "Hiccup?" I heard him question. The anger in his voice was gone.

"Yeah, it's him." Hookfang appeared from behind Snotlout. My cousin turned to the dragon in human form and gave him a confused look. "It's not Mildew!" confirmed the taller boy He gently took the sword from my cousin, and Snotlout didn't fight back or even realize his sword was being taken from him. He then took my cousin over to one of the beds in the room and helped him sit there.

Camicazi, Thuggory, and I exchanged looks. This was not how my cousin usually was. What happened to him? And how was Mildew involved?.

"Uh may we come in?"

Hookfang looked a little squeamish. Uh, sure, just uh can you do me a favor and help him get to sleep a little bit later?"

The other Heirs and I both looked at each other and then shrugged. Neither of us were trained to be healers or doctors, though we did have some ideas.

"I think I can nick something from the kitchen," Camicazi suggested the best one. "So maybe?"

Hookfang nodded. "That's good enough I guess." He then let us through closing the door behind us.

Snotlout meanwhile kept looking at us, expecting something.

"What happened?" Thuggory voiced the question that was on everyone's mind.

Snotlout answered him. "It's Mildew!" he exclaimed. "He got himself something, this helmet that talks to him!"

Everyone raised an eyebrow at Hookfang, since he even in the best of cases, he was the voice of reason. "Apparently." He shruggd. "We were following Mildew last night and then Mildew found this weird helmet. Snotlout says it talked back, but I didn't hear anything."

Snotlout nodded. "No one else heard itâ€¦"

"That is definitely...odd." I wondered for a moment. What kind of us such a strange helmet have? Who made it or who owned it before Mildew? There was more information I needed to know but I did have an idea. "What color was the helmet? Was it iron?"

Hookfang thought about it for a moment, I guess he wasn't used to thinking about metals.

Snotlout answered him. "It was bronze. Bronze and it had their weird brush on it!"

I nodded. That was all I needed to know. A Roman helmet, like one of the ones my ancestor wore back when served in Fort Sinister under the banner of , a plan hatched in my head, an odd one, but one that maybe would give me more knowledge about that helmet and how it came to be. I just wondered if I needed my brother or not to carry it out. "Thanks for letting me know then. Uh, Camicazi, you willing to treat him?"

"Ya, I'll be sure to get some herbs to brew up something to make him nap. There's probably a poison I know that can workâ€¦"

Thuggory just rolled his eyes. "If you're going to go through all the trouble to poison him to make him go to sleep, I say just knock him out."

I tried to keep a polite smile. Not a good idea to take sides, I take it. "I recommend asking Fishlegs about it, I think he he brought that botany book with him."

Then, there was a knocking on the door. "Uh, hey guys." It was Fishlegs, just in time. "Am I late?"

* * *

><p>Next time, we get to see Hiccup's plan in action and how he plans to learn more about that helmet.

37. Chapter 37

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Now this is a big chapter. If not in terms of size, in terms of story. Sorry for having this a little later than usual. I think.****

****Read, Enjoy, Review.****

* * *

><p>"Are you really sure about this?"<p>

My brother looked at me then at the ceiling and shrugged. "No, but look at it this way, it's better than trying to confront Mildew about it directly. He's got a new staff and everything."

I frowned back, not liking my answer. After Hiccup had that encounter with our cousin this morning, he's decided how we were going to be spending the afternoon on a little voyage. I really didn't get what he was getting at, but I struggled to understand just how this even worked. "And you want us both to go take a nap to do it?"

He pulled the covers over his body and did a double take, making sure that everything was in order. "Yeah, it should be easy for us to do that," he said.

"I guess" I was starting to feel a little wearier in my bed, especially since my brother did organize some preparations beforehand. Hiccup ordered us a big stew earlier for lunch and I could still feel the steaming liquid simmer down in my stomach. My body had the urge to rest, to let my meal slowly settle down in my stomach. Add in the fact that our room was in the deepest, darkest place on the whole island, a place few people would go to by choice. In other words, we were in the best place to head to sleep at a time like this.

"All we have to do is keep focusing on our ancestor, Hiccup the First!"

"Or that helmet our cousin talks about."

Hiccup nodded back. "Yeah. Focus on either of those two things and that might direct whether or not we dream tonight. Just don't get sucked in."

I really don't get these memory dreams at all. I have no idea how they're even supposed to work. Most of the time we're stuck completely relieving whatever event that triggers our the memory to and now, Hiccup was planning on exploiting it to get a little bit of information.

I pulled the covers and sheets closer to my body. Well, I guess if it means figuring out more about what my ancestor knew about the King, I was all for it. One of my ancestors clearly had something of a relationship with the Red Death of some sort, even going so as far to seek him for aid. That was worth knowing more about, even if I could only gleam at it from the lens of my other ancestor.

"Yeah, yeah." I yawned, the weariness I was feeling was build up within me. "Just so long as we got what we came for" Briefly, I wondered if any of my descendants will ever have to go through this.

"Sleep tight." Hiccup blew out a candle. Darkness surrounded us and for a moment, I wondered how long it would take for me to go to sleep.

Yet for some reason, I don't know how, I ended up on my feet again when I didn't remember standing up. I didn't move or leave my spot, all I know was that I was suddenly aware that I stood. Come to think of it, that wasn't the only thing wrong; I didn't feel tired anymore, like my stomach was devoid of warm soup. Another thing was that the room's furniture had all disappeared. Lastly what really set me off was that my brother, Hiccup, was in chains.

Hiccup looked like himself, but he was stripped bear naked and wearing only shredded cloth. He picked himself up and examined himself for a moment, pulling at his chains.

I silently nodded still trying to process and understand what was happening. Did the plan fail? Did we end up getting sucked into a different memory? Maybe we were re-experiencing that meeting my two ancestors meet for the first time, but with my brother as the captive this time. The setting was nearly the time; there was even the Consul approaching us at the edge of the room.

Hiccup turned to me, clearly aware of what was happening. He groaned. "Well, I can't say this is a new experience for meâ€¦" He touched himself in a few places, particularly at his knees for some reason. Was he in pain?

"Are we in the right memory?" I asked him. "I mean, you're a captive like I was!"

Hiccup turned to me for a split second. "I don't think so. Look!" He pointed at the Consul as he neared us.

The Consul was very much the same man as I recall; hateful expression, long flowing garments, obscenely fat. He was exactly the same as in the last dream. Yet, despite all that, what he said really made it clear we were not in the same memory. "You could have been the best of, _Fish!" _He spoke in a strange tongue I didn'tâ€¦ know, yet for now I understood it.

I turned back to my brother for a moment. In a split second, it was like he had changed into someone older, more mature before my very eyes. Now that I thought about it, Hiccup the First looked much like my own brother, save that his head was noticeably red and he was both older and much stronger looking. He was a man built for fighting, that was for sure. Hiccup the First only rolled his eyes at the Consul. "For the last time, my name's not Fish!" Except that he wasn't Hiccup the First.

"Uh, Hiccupâ€¦" I don't really know how to describe it, but my brother was both himself and not. When I looked at him, I saw two faces, one his and one someone else's. It boggled the mind to understand how it all would have worked out, but I understood that my brother and my ancestor both shared the same space for the time being.

"Not right now, Toothless." My brother turned to me. His face and body firmly remained that of my older brother for a moment. "I'm having having a tough enough time as it is trying to keep myself from losing it!" He then stared back at the Consul, shifting back into our ancestor.

The Consul beamed, his glare hiding clear hatred. "You were the most

promising pupil we've ever encountered, and this is how you repay us?"

'Fish' sighed and said nothing.

The Consul stared back, his hands gripping hard on the cold iron bars of our cell.

I pursed my lips, watching as my brother, well, my several "greats" back grandfather exchanged silent glares with the Consul. It was all so confusing, but I guess this was a dream. Hiccup probably had it worse, because he assumed the form and our memory of our ancestor. Usually, that meant that we'd get swept up, riding the emotions and thoughts of events long gone, but that's why I was here. I was my brother's anchor, the one keeping him from completely losing himself here.

The two men exchanged their glares for a moment longer, hard, cold footsteps approached, plenty of them. A small squad of soldiers dressed in that strange Roman guard approach the cells, interrupting the staring contest.

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock," one of the soldiers said, unfolding a scroll of parchment. "It is time."

The Consul stepped out of the way and gave the soldiers the right of way. "Finally," he said. "Is the Legate willing to try this traitor now?"

The soldiers all exchanged sideways glances, but made sure to keep their heads locked into position. "It appears so," the one holding the scroll said, he sounded quite happy to be doing it. "He's called for a meeting in the War Room."

"Splendid," said the Consul. "I shall accompany you. Take him away."

Two of the Romans opened and entered the cage.

I stepped out of their way. While I knew they couldn't see and interact with me because I wasn't really there, I didn't want to test the limits of my 'nonexistence' in Hiccup's dream.

My so many greats grandfather did nothing as they unlocked the chains that held him to the walls, letting have the first experience of freedom he had for a while. He took advantage of this brief lapse to flex his sore wrists. He didn't appear to have given up, rather I think he didn't feel like fighting against the Romans. I wonder why. Was he planning on making an escape? No, he wasn't—strangely, I knew somehow that wasn't what was happening.

Another pair of manacles was put on Hiccup the First, this time, a more mobile set. The soldiers took him out of the cell and put him in the dead center of the soldiers, all aligned in a formation of some sort. I slipped out before they closed the gate and went towards my brother, just as the soldiers began a quiet march down the hallways. Strangely, I can't help but feel the sound eerily familiar. "So, I'm guessing this has to do with you letting me out of jail a while back? Well, when we pretended to be our ancestors, I mean."

Hiccup returned to himself, shrugging. The chains were still on him, but they didn't seem to bother him. "Yeah. He kinda ended up getting found outâ€¦ I think one week ago?"

I blinked. "Wait, you know how many days ago since it's been our ancestors last met each other?"

He shrugged. "Don't you?"

"Uhâ€¦" I was about to say 'no', but I suddenly realized that it has infact been a week from Hiccup the First perspective. I keep forgetting that these memories sometimes end filling in the blanks for you, strangely enough. "Right, so...what else do we know?"

Hiccup pursed his lips and I saw him try to think. "Hm, I still don't know why the earliest 'Hiccup' in our family went out of his way to freeâ€¦"

"I don't know his name either, and I _was _him."

"...Our other ancestor," Hiccup completed. He shook his head. "I guess we don't know everything about our ancestors. Gee, I guess remembering times and dates is better than knowing names!"

I shrugged. "Hey, it's better than nothing. Maybe we'll find something important." Especially if that something meant defeating the Red Death.

The soldiers let us down several corridors, leading us straight toward the site of what would one day be Dagur's throne room.. Everything was mostly the same, except that Fort Sinister was far plainer, more polished, but the Throne Room was drastically different.

In the current day and age, Dagur's throne room was a typical Viking affair, a room stuffed to the brim with decorative furs, expensive sets of armor, and featured a large feasting table reserved for personal guests.

In my ancestor's memory, the Fortress's room was totally different. Instead of one big table laden with food and drink, there were a dozen smaller tables with stacked with papers of various sorts, from maps, to charts, to what I think were reports. There were soldiers as well as people not dressed up as soldiers at each table, all discussing and chattering. But as Hiccup and I approached, each of them turned to look at our ancestor.

It was at the end of the room, near a great brazier that stood where Dagur's throne would one day be that was a man huddling by the blaze, looking at his sword. His features were bronze, even his skin practically seemed to give a well polished metallic luster. He certainly didn't look like or resemble anyone I knew, was this what Romans looked like?

The soldiers all turned to bow at the man, owing him respect. Hiccup turned back into our ancestor and did much the same. Even I had the temptation to kneel, but I reminded myself I wasn't here and that was enough to stop me from doing so. The only other people present that didn't bow were the Consul and two other men behind the Legate, both

dressed up in long robes much like the Consul was. The large man took this opportunity to move toward what I imagine were his peers.

The Legate let us kneel for a moment and then gave the men a commanding word. "Arise and we may begin.." The soldiers did so. The Legate turned to look at Hiccup the First with a look I was only sure was pity. He sighed. "Do you know why you're here. Prefect Fish?"

The oldest grandfather I knew turned a hard glare to the men standing beside the Legate. "Sadly, I do."

The Legate didn't seem to notice it, but I did. "What's our great, great grandfather have against those two?"

"Toothless!" Hiccup snapped, becoming himself once more.

"What? I don't know!"

He shook his head. He pointed at the one on the Legate's right. "I don't know their names that well, but I think that one is a soothsayer."

I pointed out at that man. His tunic and robes were stained faintly red. "Like our grandfather, Old Wrinkly?"

Hiccup gave me a disgusted look, like he was incredibly ill just thinking about it. "I wish." He shook his head. Before I was about to ask how he was different, my brother had this to say. "Please don't ask _how _he foretells the future, just don't?"

I opened my mouth and closed it again. Okay, right. "So what's the deal with the other one."

"The other, I think might be some sort of healer, a doctor, I think."

This time it was my turn to make a face. After learning a bit from Fishlegs about how doctoring was done Viking style, I really wish I didn't know. I mean, really placing hot irons to seal a bleeding wound after getting the patient drunk against his will? I hope I don't have to go through something like that ever. "Okay, don't want to know more."

Hiccup nodded and then returned to assume the form of our ancestor once more.

The Legate frowned at him. "Fish, please, be reasonable. You know that man is a wanted fugitive who has evaded capture for over a year. We would never have found him if I weren't for you."

My ancestor apparently did not like that. His face turned to the ground and stared at his feet. Even though I could barely see him, I could see the beads of nervous sweat dripping down at him. "I didn't see why he should be imprisoned!"

The three men behind the Legate all gave disapproving stares, met only by Hiccup's hard stare. "He is a criminal, a dangerous one at that!" barked the physician. "You, especially, would have an idea of the kind of damage he was capable of!"

Hiccup the First nodded, his gaze cold. "'Capable of,'" he responded turning his own words right at him "I don't know, but I've been thinking, if he was so dangerous, _why _did _you_ want me to capture him?"

The Legate's expression turned to one of consideration, turning back to the men standing behind him. "Hm, that is something interesting. Prefect Hiccup subdued the Night Fury, there was no reason we shouldn't have simply ended him if he was as dangerous as he was."

"He was disarmed!" said the Consul. "Once his abilities and means to change into a more threatening form were taken away from him, he was as powerless as any ordinary man! Were it not for one of _your men _turning traitor to Rome, he would have been successfully detained!"

The Legate nodded. "But why did we need him _alive?"_

Hiccup the First rattled his chains to get attention. "Back before I freed the captive, I found the Consul interrogating him in the dungeons. He was asking him about something, I didn't know what, but the captive had kept telling the Consul he would never have it."

The Legate frowned and turned to the men behind him, a look of confusion and wonderment in his gaze. "What is Fish talking about? What were you trying to get from our captive?"

The Consul and his companions all gave barely restrained and hateful looks at 'Fish', one met with an almost comedic satisfaction. Apparently, he was in on something that we didn't know much about.

This time, it was the soothsayer that spoke up. "That is not our concern right now!" he shouted. He held up an ornate, strange looking helmet in one hand, a rusted knife in his other. I vaguely understood them to be hisâ€| instruments I think. "Tell me what you told us earlier!" he shouted to the helmet.

And just like that, I felt a silent chill in the air. _"He is coming," _a voice rasped, one that had no definite source, yet I was sure that the helmet was what spoke, the faint lights in the place where eyes were only made me feel that was more likely. Was this what Snotlout was talking about?

"I hate that thingâ€|" voice the Legate for all of us. "What's he going on about this time?"

"That the Night Fury is returning, bringing with him the _Sea Dragonicus Giganticus Maximus_ to wipe us out!" The diviner then pointed an accusing finger over to my ancestor. "If _you _hadn't set him free, we would not be facing this dilemma!"

Hiccup the First glared back. He rattled his chains and swung them forward. "Gee, well, you should have probably thought about getting someone without a _conscience _to join your little group!"

But amidst all the beckoning and arguing, I stood there, frozen. The Red Death was coming? Here? Now? Was my ancestor so ticked off at the

Romans for capturing him that he enlisted that monster's aid to destroy them all? Suddenly, now I understood why the Romans never colonized the rest of the Barbaric Archipelago...

"**Are you ready?" **A voice spoke in my head and I blinked. I recognized it, it was the King, reaching out to me via some sort of connection. But how? I turned and frantically wondered where he was and then I found myself slipping and had my legs dangling down just at the edge of the roof top. I pulled myself back up to the roof, realizing I was no longer in the same room my brother was. In fact, I was no longer 'Toothless'.

I was a Night Fury, again, but not just any other Night Fury, either. I was in the body of my ancestor, the one who that had been imprisoned a week ago. I found myself speaking, automatically. "My leige," I spoke to the wind, in a low tone. It was so strange to know it was someone else actually doing the talking, but I let my ancestor do what he needed, or maybe I needed to do. I, well, that is the normal me didn't know what to say. "I have but one request."

"**Speak and it shall be yours favored child," **I heard the King speak to me. It was a strange feeling, having the one I would regard as my worst enemy speak to me so cordially, but then again it wasn't me he was speaking to.

"I wish to save this one." I kept my body low to the roof, feeling for sound through the stone. Vaguely, my sensitive ears could make out the sounds of loud discussion, shouting I was sure. Hopefully, Prefect Fish did not get himself killed at this point. "I owe him."

I felt the King's presence stir inside of me. Even better, I got to have a friend spared from this madness. "**I suppose your request is not unreasonable. I have no special love or hatred for any of the sons of the Oathbreaker, but if you owe him a debt than I shall help you fulfill it. Very well, before the rest of our Kin arrive, you may take him and spirit him away from this place. Let the children of the wolf burn.**"

I nodded to no one in particular. "Thank you.**" **I turned and looked at the skies in the distance. The rest of the King's forces were going to be upon us soon. I know I wasn't much of a dragon compared to the rest of them but in a way, they were among the last family I got left. With the forces for the Romans gathered here, now was the perfect time to rid these lands of them and exact our revenge. If Rome was so certain I was a mass murdering monster, then fine, I shall prove them right. I was a Roman Citizen no longer.

I blasted the roof down and dived in the new entrance I made.

The humans inside all gave a startled screams. Several had gotten flattened by my entrance. Those that survived fell into formation, their weapons braced and ready for the event I jumped ontop of them.

Unfortunately, I knew better than to jump ontop of them. I flew around the room and blasted more of the ceiling to fall on top of the columns of Romans.

Auxiliaries, lightly armored troops with different weapons tried to barge into the room, but I blasted the door shut with a blast of plasma. The room fell into disarray, with the only semblance of control and authority centered at the very back, the Legate, the Consul, and a bunch of other men I did not like at all. The Centurions fell back to that end of the room, huddling together and locking their shields form a defensive perimeter. That was fine by me. I didn't care about them at all; the other dragons can do what they wanted with the Romans.

"What is the meaning of this!" barked that over bloated Consul.

"We have to get to shelter!"

I flew over the group of troops and quickly grabbed at their captive, snatching him like he was a fish in the water with my left arm. The Prefect screamed and yelped, hopefully he forgave me a little later.

The Centurions once they realized I was turning and heading for the exit I made sent a volley or spears my way. I quickly went as fast as I could and to evade the incoming weapons and for the most part I seemed okay.

The Romans all went into high alert after that display, but I didn't care. I turned to look at my my new captive, well, for now. I was going to set him free after thisâ€¦. He still screamed and panicked, keeping his arms wrapped around mine in attempt not to fall. "Don't worry," I told him, I knew it wouldn't do him any good, but I thought that maybe I could calm him down. "I won't let youâ€¦ go..."

It was at this point, I realized my grip on the other man was slipping and that my arm felt strangely unresponsive. Come to think of it my left wing felt stiff as well.

A cold sensation ran up my spine and I realized that I didn't exactly escape the Roman's unscatched. There was a spear embedded in to my side, blood dripping out of it. And then, just as I realized it, pain and weakness wracked my body.

I lost my grip on Fish and my stiff wings no longer helped me support my flying. We both fell.

"Okay, Toothless, I think it wake up time now!"

And then we crashed into the roof top.

* * *

><p>Toothless groaned and rubbed at his side, still feeling that spear that pierced. "I know it's all a dream, but that hurts you know!"<p>

I clutched at my head, still feeling woozy from falling and breaking all of my bones. "You're tell me! You fell on top of me!"

Toothless then decided to laugh that. "Well, I guess it's the bigger brother's job to break my falls for me, even in my dreams."

I rolled my eyes. "Gee, some brother are you..."

With that dream session over, we were now back in the real world, experiencing a number of imaginary injuries. I know it's all a dream and there was no lasting damage done to our bodies, our bodies still felt a little stiff upon waking up. The sensation was starting to fade now that the blood was circulating in our veins, but man was waking up after that fall a doozy.

"So, what do we do now?" asked Toothless. He drank from a mug of water and licked his lips, probably because he crashed his mouth into the side of the wall in the dream.

"I'm going to see Dagur; I need him to help me get that helmet off of Mildew." While the dream was a bit longer than I thought it was going to be, I learned from it the function of that helmet my cousin was talking about. Apparently, the Roman soothsayer consulted it for information. That was both good and bad. That information could be useful to helping us locate the traitor. The downside was that Mildew currently had it and I just knew he was going to use that knowledge in ways I wouldn't like. I could probably get the twins to do it, but I didn't think I wanted to risk things just yet. Besides, I might need Dagur to help me learn about some of the things that happened in Fort Sinister, maybe there was something he knew that I didn't. The Romans certainly knew about the King.

Toothless nodded in approval. "Good; I hate that guy!" I then heard my brother's stomach rumble something fierce.

I laughed at that. "Well, I guess while I'm off to meet a deranged boy-king to confront a crazy old man who shoots lightning, you can go have dinner." I think it was nearing that time. The outside hallway seemed to be loud enough for it, with people and staff moving to find tables to seat all the guests.

"Hiccup!" my brother complained. Toothless threw a pillow at me, his face turning a little red. I ducked under the bed side.

I laughed mischievously. It's kinda been a while since either of us just messed around. Between how things were getting and all, neither of us really felt like. relaxing. But after experiencing my ancestor's point of view, I kind of felt like wanting to just to joke around with my brother. Maybe it's because Hiccup the First had terrible relationships with his. "What? I'm just stating the obvious!"

Toothless shoved and elbow into my side, laughing. It felt good to hear him loosen up a little. "Just for that, I'm not going to save you any cheese tonight!"

"Hey! I need that." I didn't really, but it just felt good saying that. I headed toward the door, still laughing. It was dumb of us, I know, but compared to just getting our skulls cracked open from an event before our grandparents were born, it had to be pure genius. "Well, fine, I'll see you around, bud!" I opened the door and began to step out.

"Hey, uh Hiccup!" my brother called to me, just as I was about to close the door.

"Uh, is something the matter, Toothless?"

"I was justâ€¦ wondering."

I stepped back into the room and shut the door behind me. "Wondering what?"

"Well, being a Night Fury is apparently the family business right?"

I shrugged. "I guess." Pretty much everyone we knew on our Mom's side of the family was a Night Fury. It was a weird at first, sure, but honestly, it wasn't too bad. It was just the weird family quirk. I knew people with webbed feet or massive foreheads, honestly, it's at about that level of strangeâ€¦ well, by our standards anyways.

"I've been wondering, maybe I should stop denying that I'm one."

I approached my brother. "You meanâ€¦."

He nodded without me completing my question. "Yeah, I've been thinking about it. I mean, I don't know how many greats great father lived among the Romans and he was fine up until things went badâ€¦. Maybe, maybe I should try something like that, what do you think?"

This was a surprise. I never would have thought taking my brother to this trip would have convinced him to being a Night Fury again. I knew he had been considering on changing into one, because it meant having a better speed and firepower when we were going to face our enemies, but I knew he wasn't thinking about _living _as a Night Fury or just turning into one to relax or whatever. This a a big change; my brother was considering on accepting a part of him he previously rejected. I smiled. I already knew what words to say, eight words in fact. "I bet I can fly faster than you."

Toothless smiled back. "No way! I'll fly circles around you."

"Good, because compared to me, all you can do is fly in circles!" We laughed about it for a bit, even as I left the room.

A while ago, I decided that I was content to live the rest of my life as a Night Fury if I had to do. While these days, I was sure that I didn't have to do that, a part of me realized that the life I wanted to live was not one where I was forced to pick one or the other. I am a Night Fury as much as I was a boy. I'm glad that Toothless and I both shared that ideal. We did not want to give up.

I marched towards Dagur's throne room, night had already fallen and dinner time was going to soon be on its way. A small crowd of the other Chiefs formed in the hallway all chatting and discussing things in secret. Dagur himself was in this group, relaying a story about how he wants to go on a hunting trip by himself for around a month.

"Ah, Hiccup!" he said, just as I approached him. He grabbed onto my head and put me into an arm lock. "How's it going?"

"Uh, Dagur," I said, feeling my cheeks turn flush. "We need to talk." The other Chiefs contorted their faces into shallow gazes; I was still not popular, not with my whole having been a dragon and giving

the Berserker Chief a ludicrous idea and all. They probably thought I had more crazy ideas, and honestly, I was not quite far off.

"What, you mean now?" Dagur, too, did not quite like to be taken away from spirited storytelling.

I cringed, I knew Dagur probably wanted to revel a bit longer. Good thing I knew a few words that'd get him to not complain so much about it. "I think I might know something about the Red Death."

The slightly older boy's eyes lit up. "Oh, well, why didn't you say so? Tell us!" As much as I didn't want to manipulate Dagur, I didn't really have much of a choice. Then again, he did seem overly eager in sharing roughly the same goal.

"In private." I said.

Dagur hesitated for a moment, enough to let my head out of his grip. He gave a thoughtful look to me, really considering it. "I guessâ€¦" he said. He turned back to the crowd of Chiefs that surrounded us and shrugged. "Well, I guess we can finish that story latter; this is real important."

I gave the other Chieftains a sheepish smile. The other Chiefs' faces all glowered some more. Yeah, I am not winning points with any of them. Now I was a pariah on an international level; what else was new?

The Berserker Chief lead us into the throne room, the closest room nearby that no one was in at the moment. He stepped onto his throne and took a seat and sat in what probably was an awkward fashion. "So, tell me, what'd you want?"

I nodded. Now was my chance. "I've learned that Mildew might have something that provides us with more information about the Red Death." Well, that was most likely true, but I didn't exactly know for sure. In the memory, I saw the helmet Snotlout talked about, but I didn't really know anything about it other than the Roman soothsayerâ€¦ yuck... talked to it to help him learn about things. As the Romans knew more about the King, up to having an precise and overly specific name for what kind of dragon he was, that was certainly more than I know.

Dagur thought for a moment. "You mean that old man no one likes? Why didn't you just take it from him? I mean, he is your subject right?"

I cringed. "He doesn't exactly listen to me and he's not exactly someone I would want to face alone.."

"You really need my help for this?" Dagur snorted as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing. I guess he never seen Mildew shoot lightning from his staff. That's not something I wanted to be on the receiving end of.

"Yeah, I'm sure. Look we need to-"

And then the door to the throne room opened. I stopped talking as my eyes widened in surprise and sudden fear.

Mildew stepped into the throne room, staff in hand, but that's not the part that scared me the most. It was who was beside the old man, bound in iron chains and with a face gagged. "Astrid!" I looked in abject horror.

Mildew glared at me, his expression one of stern hate and disgust. The helmet was tied to his waist, that much I could see. He turned to the Berserker Chief and then jabbed Astrid in the legs, sending her to fall onto her knees. "This, is the traitor!"

My heart sank. I knew I was considering that Astrid might have been corrupted or something, but I didn't want to admit it. I just didn't want to believe it. "Astrid!" I choked out and neared my girlfriend.

Mildew raised his staff at me and I knew he was taking aim. "Not one step closer, _boy!" _

I stopped, as much as I didn't want to. I wanted Astrid to be safe, unbound. She might or might not have been the traitor, but that didn't mean she wasn't still my girlfriend.

Dagur got out of his seat and went over to Mildew. Now his interest was piqued, but he said nothing. He probably didn't even care about the traitor, just that there was conflict brewing right in front of him. Fine, I didn't care about that either.

"Let her go!" I snapped.

Mildew stared at me, his expression particularly venomous. "No," he spat. "I don't answer to you, _dragon!" _He sent a bolt of lightning my way and there was nothing I could do but taking it.

I don't know how to describe what I felt. It was like a sudden flash of white hot pain and fire ran through my body. I felt my feet and body detach from the ground as a sort of weightlessness carried me. And then, finally, I felt my back hurt as a sudden force struck me from behind. When I came to my senses once again, I realized I was on the ground, feeling every aching pore in my body ring a sensation of utter pain in my ears. I felt my chest and upper abdomen. The entire front part of my shirt was burned off by electrical forces at Mildew's command and I wanted to know just how much I was bleeding as a result. Yet what I found alarmed me more disturbing. A texture of smooth, fine scales covered my chest; the spell keeping me human no longer worked.

Hazily, I tried to pick myself up, but the sensation of pain and weariness kept me from moving more than an inch at a time.

Mildew approached the throne, Dagur still eying us all, wondering whose side he should take. "So, any chance you can tell me how you did that?"

Mildew practically snarled. I could tell he didn't have the patience for Dagur. "We don't have the time for that!" He knocked Astrid down onto her side and then aimed his staff right at her. "If I had captured this traitor earlier, I wouldn't be in a hurry to warn you!"

"Warn us?" I choked out. I felt like all of the breath in my lungs

had escaped when Mildew blasted me, making my attempt to stand all that much harder.

Mildew stared at me, his expression still hateful. "To warn you that the dragons were coming...or rather, that they're already here."

* * *

><p>And now, begins the return of Hiccup's return to being a Night Fury and in probably the worst circumstances he could imagine.

38. Chapter 38

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Well, this chapter too far longer than expected. I ended up getting side tracked for several days in a row. But oh well, now I'm here and ready to post this. Hope you enjoy this is quite a long chapter than normal.****

* * *

><p>"So, dragons are comingâ€|?" Dagur asked, absentmindedly juggling a knife. He sounded absolutely uninterested and relaxed, compared to everyone else in the room who was focused on important matters.<p>

I clutched at my chest, feeling my muscles strain as I climbed to my feet; the burning pain coursed through me, making my struggle to stand and walk forward all that much harder. My tunic felt tight around the shoulders, I was growing, growing larger, that much was clear. My time as a human being was nearing its end.

I don't know what hurt my heart more, the fact that my chest felt like Thor decided to have some target practice, or the idea that Astrid was the traitor the whole time. I was considering it, only because I noted that my girlfriend was acting a little out of the ordinary, but I never really seriously considered she'd be the one. I couldn't believe it she would never do this! Then, I realized that what Astrid wanted didn't matter. The King might have promised that he wouldn't mess with her head, but I was so unsure on whether his word meant anything at this point. He a being that considered imprisonment and brainwashing as proper repayment for a favor.

The old man impatiently tapped his staff down at the floor, sparks rippled in front of Astrid's covered face. Cold shivers ran down my body, dulling my pain with the knowledge and responsibility that I had to do something, anything to get me and my girlfriend out of this alive. Traitor or no, Astrid was Astrid; I had to save her. Otherwise, well, I didn't want to think about the price for failing to be a good boyfriend.

"Yes. Now, are you going to do something or not?" Mildew slammed his staff again, the sparks were larger this time. He was clearly getting tired of waiting.

Dagur looked back and forth between me and Mildew, quite literally looking at his options. I knew, on the one hand, Mildew came to warn

him about an impending dragon attack, which as the Chieftain, Dagur had to consider seriously. On the other, Mildew did kind of walk into a place he wasn't invited in and threatened to seriously injure a guest of his.

I decided that may now was not the best time to let Dagur do the choosing. "If he's rightâ€¦" I managed to wheeze. "We have to ready our defensesâ€¦ ughâ€¦" My breathing was still so irregular, that main so...dull, concerningly dull, but atleast I can stand my ground and not have to worry about falling.

Mildew's gaze turned hard against me. He clearly didn't like the fact I was supporting him, even if I was meant furthering his own ends. "Why are you helping me, _ dragon_?"

I gave the old man an awkward little smile, I tried to keep myself looking as non-threatening and non-defensive as possible in the hopes that maybe, just maybe he wouldn't think about performing some preemptive 'defense'; I didn't want him to launch more lightning at me. I know I probably might survive another hit, but that stuff really hurts. I shrugged, pretending to be clueless and indifferent, probably helped by the fact I felt still so woozy and off balance. "Oh, no reason. I just don't want anything messing up Dagur's special week, isn't that right?"

"Hm, maybeâ€¦" Dagur mused. He still looked quite indifferent about the whole thing, although his gaze was now firmly affixed to what was in Mildew's staff as he kept pounding at the floor with his staff, sending weak sparks all over Astrid's head. I really hope that wasn't going to cause any permanent damage or anything. "But first, mind telling me how you do that trick?"

Mildew stopped his impatient actions and looked Dagur right in the face, his gaze clearly threatening something. Dagur didn't seem to care, but I knew Mildew was slowly losing his patience. "Can we just hurry it up and get to defending ourselves? The dragons will be here any minute!" Mildew barked.

Dagur didn't listen. "What do you want for it?" He apparently really wanted to know how to shoot lightning. Was it really a surprise? Berserker's had the Skrill, a dragon that shot beams of deadly lightning, as their emblem for Thor's sake. Shooting lightning was practically a stone's throw away from having a Skrill!

I was about to interrupt the conversation and offer to maybe give Dagur something similar another day, but Mildew immediately took the chance before I could stop him. "What about the head of a Night Fury?" Mildew turned his gaze over to me and I suddenly felt the urge to check if my head was still attached to my neck. He wanted my head.

Unfortunately for me, though Dagur was undeniably crazy, he wasn't exactly a fool either. He turned to me, seriously considering the madman's offer. The worst part about this all was that I knew Dagur wasn't kidding. He's sold me out once before this one time when I visited. I really don't want to relive that incident with that fisherman and the drummer again. "Hmâ€¦" he mused. "Is that all?"

"Dagur! Wait!" I snapped. "Remember, we have to face the Red Death

and make you a legend!" If there was any chance I had to make it out of here alive, I had to appeal directly to Dagur's ego. I just hoped that shooting out lightning was not as important to him as getting his name recorded in history forever.

The Berserker Chief rubbed at his chin, the decision was being weighed carefully on his mind. "Yeah, that's right. We gotta go kill that dragon in a few days."

I nodded vigorously. My body had mostly recovered from Mildew's blast at this point and I was being as animate as possible in the hopes it made a difference. "So, we've gotta repel that attack Mildew brought up, or else we won't have a fleet to face him!"

Mildew hissed and shoot lightning at me a second time. I quickly dropped my body to the floor and avoided the blast, my hairs standing on end. Someone might have called me a coward, I would have responded and said I was alive. "Don't listen to him!" Mildew spat. "He's just using you to make up for one of his mistakes!"

Dagur turned to me, his face turning into a scowl. "Is this true?"

I opened my mouth to answer, but then immediately closed it. In a sense, Mildew was right. I was using Dagur for my own ends. I lacked the manpower to go against the King with just Berk. Only someone who didn't really know what the King was capable of would dare think about challenging him with the forces I had. Berk had lots of able warriors sure, but the King— well, he was almost a god. I needed Dagur to face him and his Flights. Mildew was absolutely right— I was using Dagur for my own purposes, all to save a father that I doomed. Oh, Odin, was I just as bad as the King? "Sort of," I replied. My conscience wouldn't let me deny it, not fully. Sometimes I wish I wasn't such a goody two shoes...

Dagur frowned. He very clearly didn't like the idea of being 'used' by anyone, certainly not me. Emotions flashed before Dagur's face, astonishment, surprise, regret. I know Dagur was a little off his rocker, but honestly, I think I forgot that even he was a person with his own desires, his own goals. "You were going to use me— but why?"

"To save my Dad," I sighed. I didn't feel like lying to him, hopefully maybe a little honesty was what I needed to get him back on my side. I turned my gaze away from him, looking at Astrid's still, bound form. "The Red Death is powerful and I knew that you wouldn't care about saving him, but I knew you'd just jump at the chance to write your name down in the history books."

Dagur blinked, his eyes lighting up with astonishment and then contorted into a scowl once he realized how he must have looked. "Wait, you mean that part is actually real?" He pointed at Mildew. "That part that he said the Red Death captured your Dad—"

"Was twisting him into a dragon," I completed. "Yeah, it's real."

The Berserker Chief brought his hand to his temples, as if his head was straining to understand it all. It almost seemed strange how different Dagur acted now. Did he really not even consider the things Mildew said at all to be true before? Or maybe he just never really

seriously thought about a dragon turning a Viking into a dragon. Honestly, that kind of power might have actually scared him, deep down. How was a man supposed to challenge something like that? He scowled right at me. "That's unreal!"

Mildew snorted and slammed his staff down one more time, lighting up the whole room in a vibrant flash that faded not a moment later. "His father trusted him, and now, he's been captured and made a servant to a monster!" spat the old man. "And that's what'll happen to you if you follow this _dragon's_ words!"

Dagur grabbed one of his daggers, holding it at the tip, ready to throw it, aimed to me. If he didn't like the idea of being made a puppet of by someone else, he certainly loathed the idea of following the plans of a crazy partially dragon boy that'd get him killed or worse, especially if meant nothing came good out of it. I had to think of something fast or my life as well as Astrid's would be forfeit.

I raised up my hands in pleading motions "Wait, Dagur!"

Dagur squinted his eyes at my direction, eying me. He held his dagger in his hands, checking to see if it was sharp and deadly enough to do what he was thing. "And what do you have to say to me?" He didn't sound pleased, which made what I was going to do all the harder.

"You can still get your glory!" I said, an appeal to greed.

Dagur eyed me, suspicious of my motives. Well to be fair, I manipulated him before, but now maybe now was time to come clean.

"Yeah, I kinda did have my motives and all!" I shrugged. "But honestly, does that really _matter?_"

"Don't listen to him!" Mildew snapped leveling his staff.

The boy Chief made a gesture, wordlessly commanding that the old man cease. "Go on."

"Sure, I might have convinced you into taking this _Quest_, against your better judgement, but think about it, has anything really changed? You still want the glory that comes from defeating the Red Death, don't you? I get my parents back, sure, but do you really care about my motives, when the prize is still right in front of you?"

"Maybe!" Dagur appeared to think about that for a moment. Being manipulated by me or no, he was still the boy who liked to laugh at danger and avoid better judgement. He wanted the fame that came from slaying the great dragon.

Mildew gave me a scowl, muttering curses hopefully not actual curses though.

Dagur's expression wavered for a moment more. He was still struggling about how he wanted to satisfy his pride. On the one hand, he didn't want me to get away without not being clear with him until now, on the other, I was his ticket to his own epic. "But on the other

handâ€| "

I cut him off then and there. I didn't want to lose his attention. "Maybe I should tell you more about the Red Death? I mean, really, why shouldn't you know a little bit more about the kill that'll make you a legend."

Dagur's eyes perked up, an expression that was both part fear and curiosity. It was getting clear to me now that Dagur was maybe afraid of the possibility this is one dragon he could never truly fight on even terms. If the Red Death can twist a man into a dragon, even a strong experienced brute of a man, then what other powers might it have? "Yeahâ€| go ahead," he said, his tone sounding a little worried, a little fearful."

I struggled to find the right words to describe the King. How could I encompass the sheer scale of a being who would regard men as if we would a mouse? How could I convey the great body whose bulk matched mountains and with teeth the size of row boats? How could explain the idea of a being that was so knowledgeable, so perfectly aware of the world around him, whose very presence could reach across the sea? It all started with four words: "The King is powerful."

Dagur's eyes widened.

And then so I told Dagur what I knew. "I'm not going to lie, the King is probably the strongest, most powerful dragonâ€| ever. He's big enough to sit on and crush Fort Sinister all by his lonesome and has power that makes Mildew's staff look like a candle lights." Dagur gulped, clear genuine fear on his face. This was probably the most human I had ever seen the Berserker Chief sinceâ€| ever. Maybe I should really consider convincing him to back outâ€| I mean, he's not _that _much older than me, right? I scratched the back of my head, my hand claw like enough I could feel it against my skin. "Listen, Dagur, I'm not gonna blame you for not wanting to do this, he's deadly and well, he's not your problemâ€|"

And then Dagur threw a knife at me. I was lucky it only landed at my feet, slightly embedding itself into the stone. "No way, am I backing down!" he exclaimed, sounding just like he was making up for his bouts of hesitation earlier.

"Uhâ€| Dagur?" I sounded concerned. Wow, okay, that's weird. I was concerned for Dagur.

"I'm perfectly fine!" exclaimed the Berserker Chief. "I'm ready whenever to find and take down the Red Death! Just you wait, they'll _never _forget about me!"

I silently nodded. I guess Dagur was probably trying to deny his previous hesitation, making up for it by being overly ecstatic over a plan he was seriously thinking of abandoning not a moment ago. Still, I guess it was better than him being _angry at me_. "Uh, right." I replied. no reason to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"Bah!" Mildew snarled, drawing attention to himself. He raised his staff at me. "He's barely a boy anymore! You shouldn't listen to him!"

I backed away, Mildew stepping toward me. "Mildew, can we just stop

about this right now?" I pleaded. Great, great, just like how it always is, out of one situation into another.

"No," spat the man.

"What do you have against me?" In all the time I had known Mildew, I never could understand his motivations. It was one thing to hate me for cursing myself into turning into some weird Night Fury-boy-thing, but I struggled to imagine just why Mildew took things as far as he did. No one else on Berk had as much hatred and disgust for me or any of my friends; what was his reason for being against us? What was the cause of his vendetta. I sighed to myself. "Don't you even care about the impending dragon horde about to crash into us any moment now?" I reminded them. I think I was probably the only one in the whole room who even recalled this.

In perhaps the oddest of circumstances, Dagur took my side on this one. "Yeah, let him go. I mean, we've got to deal with those dragons!" It's strange to think Dagur was acting reasonably and responsibly. And then, he added. "Hm, I wonder what kinds of things we can make with the skinâ€¦" Then again, maybe I was just reading too deeply.

Mildew didn't back down. "No, I don't answer to you, boy!"

Dagur squinted at the man and pulled out a sword from nearby the throne "Hey no one talks to me like that!" Mildew's staff turned away from me slightly, aiming between me and Dagur as the other boy approached.

"Fellas, dragons!" I reminded them, my hands up in the air.

"One more first!" Mildew declared.

And then, suddenly Mildew yelped in sudden pain. One second he was on the ground, grasping at his leg with one hand and covering his face with the other. Astrid was right behind him getting ready to land a fist into Mildew's face. It had occurred to me then that no one of us really paid attention to her in the past few minutes due to all the tension in the air.

"Astrid?" I paused.

"In a minute," she declared. She lobbed a fist into Mildew's face, but then the old man got the upper leg and then battered her with her staff. The hit didn't phase her much since she blocked it with an armguard, but then a violent bright light shone and a clap of thunder struck my girl friend down onto the floor.

Mildew ran out the door, but I didn't care about him in the least.

"Astrid!" I yelled running to her side. Even Dagur approached by, whistling at the sight but otherwise silent. I hope that Mildew got cut down in his retreat. The loud noises and the fact he was fleeing from the throne room should have at least alerted some guards or any stabhappy Vikings about his crime.

My girlfriend was on the ground, still breathing and still fighting to stand. "I'll get him for that!" she choked. Her clothes were

burned just like mine, but her right arm had taken the brunt of Mildew's blow, it being tinged red, almost like it had been cooked. She was bleeding in places, but I saw her flesh knit itself together, thankfully. Flecks of blue scale covered the areas hurt the most the by jolt of lightning, her rune of suppression no longer functioned, but I didn't feel too distressed about her changing, not when the alternative was far graver.

"No, don't!" I pleaded of her, holding her back. "Stay here, wait for yourself to recover!"

She nodded, not fightingâ€| for now. "I'm gonna get himâ€|"

"Later," I said. "Rest, get your strength."

"Uh, yeah, we don't have the time for that." Dagur declared, sitting nearby.

Behind him was a pair of Vikings, their faces red and dripping with sweat, they must have been runners. "Dragonsâ€|" panted one.

"Coming here!" groaned the other.

A cold shiver ran my shoulder. Mildew wasted all of the time we had to prepare over a petty grudge or something. Now, chances were the dragons were going to make a repeat of what happened all those months ago and burn the whole village! Great, just great. There was no way this could possibly be any worse.

Astrid coughed. "Hiccup."

"Astrid?" I looked at her. She had stopped changing, still mostly human but with a few obviously draconic features, such as her teeth. "Are you alright?"

"A littleâ€|" she shook her head. "Areâ€| our Kin coming?"

And just then the bottom fell out of my stomach; was Astrid really corrupted by the King?

* * *

><p>After spending a little time as my ancestor, I think I've started shifting back to wanting to become a dragon after spending so long out of it.. Months ago, I stopped thinking of myself as a Night Fury. I rejected the claim because I, well, I didn't want to think of myself as one. At first, it was because I had given up on ever being a Night Fury again, but later, I actually found myself wanting to cling to the truth, wanting to accept a life that seemed to be a much better fit for me. I lost so much in terms of raw ability and gained human frailty, yet I felt being accepted and having a real place on Berk were fair trades. There was no reason for me to go back to being a dragon; being one didn't let me fulfill all of my wants and desires. Couple that with me wanting to distance myself as much as possible fromâ€| Mom at the time and because the next time I turned into a dragon was such a disaster, it was easy for me to not be interested.<p>

But now, having been in my ancestor's head for the second time now, I was beginning to waver. Having been my ancestor, in a body that held

so much raw power and destructive might, I began to miss the days where I had that kind of power for myself and used that power to do whatever I see fit. Even weirder, though I was vaguely aware he was born and raised human, well, Roman, whatever that was, he didn't really identify himself then either. Honestly, I had the impression he considered his being a Night Fury as his true body and I knew it was that feeling that was affecting me.

"Are you going to sit there all night long or what?"

I blinked out of my trance and turned to Stormfly who sat at my side. "Oh, right. Sorry," I said. "I was justâ€¦ thinking?" Dinner hadn't started yet and it wasn't going to until Dagur gave the word for it. After the first feast at Dagur's table, there wasn't much point in me showing up every night afterwards as I was just the younger brother, not the primary Heir. Which was fine by me since I wanted to spend as much time with the people I cared about. If any of them was the traitor, then I wanted to believe they were still my friends for as long as possible.

Meatlug and Fishlegs were on the opposite of me and Stormfly respectively, each of them whispering and chatting to themselves about the week's events. At first, the currently-not-Gronckle was a bit upset, even going so far as to not speak to the larger boy for a few minutes; apparently, during the week, there was a little bit of falling out since Fishlegs never said a word to her in a few days. She eventually warmed up to him, but that came at the expense of everyone else who was in earshot. I have decided that under no particular circumstances will I ever ask Fishlegs to sing a horribly off key tune every again.

As usual, at the nearby table were the Snotlout, Hookfang, Barf, Belch, and the twins. Discussion there was fairly typical of them from whatever snippets I gathered. The boys, well, mostly boys, were all talking about their latest plots, ranging from stealing the underwear off of barbarian Chiefs, to replacing all of the mead with pudding. The only reason they got away with any of those things, was because Dagur got a laugh out of hearing any one of their shenanigans.

Our dining hall was nowhere near as large as the Great Hall back home, but unlike back home it wasn't the only such place in town. Fort Sinister was big enough that having a single dining hall for everyone seemed impractical, particularly during a Thing. While for breakfast, which just had our food delivered right outside our doors, dinner required us to dress appropriately and feast alongside the general public in a building above ground. It made several of my friends feel uneasy, but talking helped make things easier to bare. The Chiefs and proper Heirs had their own place near Dagur, but Hiccup every now and again would sneak out and join me, usually Dagur let him. The only thing unusual as of late was that whenever Mildew was brought up, Snotlout took _really_ _heavy_ breaths.

Which left me with Stormfly. "Thinking about what?" She raised an eyebrow.

I shrugged, not really thinking my problems were all that important, at least, not those problems. I still had worse things to get out of my way before really dealing with stuff that happened so long ago. "Nothing much."

Stormfly beamed, her expression unamused. She didn't see things my way of course.

"Well it isn't!" I insisted.

She rolled her eyes, obviously not believing me. "That's what you always say."

"It's justâ€¦ stuff," I said. Although, now that I thought about it, hadn't all of my former peers essentially rejected being dragons to go live amongst us humans? True, they didn't totally give up their true natures, but they've had to spend weeks at a time not even allowing themselves the time to stretch their wings. I know Meatlug and Stormfly in particular had the roughest time at it. They were willing to go far for the sake of others, I felt only right that I did much the same for them. Sure, I didn't completely identify with being a dragon, but that didn't mean I shouldn't be willing to _pretend _to be one when I needed to.

On the other hand, what would they think? As far as I could tell, most everyone was going to treat me more or less the same; things were probably better for us overall, despite more or less losing our mentor and defecting to the former enemy. But Stormfly was a different matter. She and I didn't exactly get along all that well way back when, with her both of us tugging neck and neck to achieve prestige while we were still in training. Things were different now, but I couldn't shake the feeling that if I ever went back to being a dragon, my friendship with Stormfly would be the first thing to go away. We would be back to where we started, bitter rivals that spat at each other over the dumbest of things.

"Is it really just stuffâ€¦?" I heard her say, returning me to earth.

"Noâ€¦" I turned and lifted my gaze away from my feet. She knew something was bothering me, she knew me too well. We looked each other in the eyes for a long silent moment, like we were both being engulfed by the other.

She frowned, a little guilty look in her face. Dimly, I remembered I wasn't the only one hiding things. She put a finger on her lip as if to make sure her mouth were closed but then removed it once she realized I was looking at it. "Toothless, there'sâ€¦ something I have to tell you."

My eyes slowly lit up. She did? Was she finally going to go and tell me about what's been bothering her lately? "You do?"

She nodded, solemnly. Whatever it was, it was a very important matter.

I took her word seriously. I felt my heart stir, my breathing got heavy. A part of me felt like I should already know the answer, but, honestly, I can't really say what. "Alright, tell me,"

She then took a deep breath and exhaled deeply, clearing her body and readying herself for the important message. "Toothless, I-"

"Stormfly!" we heard someone blurt out.

Both of our gaze`s turned toward Meatlug who then promptly shut her mouth closed with her mouth, her cheeks turning red as a tomato.

Fishlegs, sitting right next to her, held tightly to the girl, looking just as embarrassed. "Sorry about that."

I squinted the eyes at the large brunette, wondering if that had anything to do with big secret my friends had. It was clear she and the most of the other dragons kept their mouths shut about something that bothered them greatly. Was this just her trying to make sure that the reason, whatever it was remained a secret? Further, I thought, did it have anything to do with the spy? I awkwardly twiddled my fingers, not really sure what to do after that. I didn't speak.

Stormfly bared her teeth in an awkward grin, just as ashamed after Meatlug's interruption. I tried to look away from her, but I could tell her face had turned a little redder. "It'sâ€| not aboutâ€| that!" she exlcaimed, yet sounded so off balance, the worst I ever heard of her. Whatever she wanted to say, it was clearly a sensitive issue. "It'sâ€| something else."

Meatlug hid herself a little behind Fishlegs, not that it did much good as she was quite large and easily visible. "Sorry, just thought it was, well, you know!"

Stormfly gave a deep exhale and rolled her eyes. "Itâ€| it wasn't that! It wasâ€| more personal, that _other _thing.."

I stayed silent during the conversation, pretending I wasn't even there. There were two big secrets that Stormfly had, one that she was about to tell me and was apparently more 'personal', another that seemingly involved the dragons. I get that it's normal for me not to know everything about my friends, but I can't help but feel like I deserved to know about things, just a little wee bit. "So, there's two things that've been bothering youâ€|?" I asked hesitantly.

Stormfly's back straightened up and her face went into an awkward cringe the moment I said that. "Oh, nothing's bothering me!" she said.

"But you just said that there was something you need to tell meâ€| and then you and Meatlug.

'No, we didn't!" Stormfly said, trying to keep her tone calm and collected.

"Yeah, we did!" Meatlug stumbled but then corrected herself, "I mean, no, nothing's wrong. Don't be silly.

I did a little internal sigh. The thing about Stormfly was that she could at times proved to be a terrible liar, coming up with words that outright contradict things she said a minute ago. I turned to Fishlegs hoping he'd back me up.

Instead what I got was an automatic, "Yeah, nothing's wrong!"

I sighed. Great, just great, I was the only at the table that was really clueless about the whole thing. He probably knew about the big problem because of his near constant contact with Meatlug. I wouldn't put it past my brother to have kept tabs on my friends, too. I'm so lost here. I clenched my hand into a fist and tightly squeezed. I should have been named 'Clueless'. "Guys, can you please just tell me what this is all about? I mean, there's either a problem or we don't!" I snapped.

My friends all stared at me with awkward, reddish faces. Even people at the other tables, including Snotlout and his gang, turned and stared. It was only then I realized just how loud my outburst actually was. Not everyone paid attention to me, we were Vikings after all, yelling and shouting are common staples; still, that left only the people that mattered to me. "Stormfly, just, please tell me what you have to say!" I hated to make a public spectacle out of this, but, honestly, I was just so tired of the secrecy. She was my friend, why couldn't she trust me?

She bowed her head and shook it after a moment's pause. "Toothless, look, I know that things haven't always been... well, you know, between us."

"Yeah, I know that," I nodded. We were first rivals, and in recent months became quite close. She was even willing to take my side against that monster the Red Death; that Nadder who wasn't Stormfly would never have done that for me.

She took another solemn breath. For a brief second, it almost felt like the entire room went silent, just for her sake. It might have just been my imagination, but that's how it all felt; everything revolved around what Stormfly had to say to me then and there. "Toothless, would you-"

And then, for the second time tonight, she had gotten interrupted by a Gronckle. Unfortunately, it wasn't Meatlug. A Gronckle crashed into through window and plowed through a dozen tables. Dishes, plates, people all were plowed through as the Gronckle clumsily flew around the room, its lack of coordination dizzy flying made it hard to predict.

It all happened so fast; more showed up. A small group of Nadders darted into the room entering by the hole the Gronckle left, shooting and spraying dozens of spikes into the air. If it wasn't for some really quick thinking and a dangerous dodge to go underneath the table, I would have ended up being a human pincushion.

Then, after them, came a Zippleback, poking its head into the breach before flooding the room with its choking gas. It was at this point I darted out and ran as fast as I could. My friends followed right behind me; none of us except Snotlout he was flameproof at the moment and he was being dragged away by Hookfang. "Hey! Let me go!" my cousin protested.

None of my friends did what would have been the reflexive thing to do and turn themselves into their true forms to join the combat. While a good idea in general, it was practically a death wish to do that in a room full of Vikings. Even if everyone knew that particular bit of information, there was little doubt the chaos and heat of battle

We hid and darted to a nearby defensive line set up when several of the smarter Vikings decided to turn the tables into barricades and cover. It might not have been completely fireproof, but it was better than nothing.

"DRAGONS!" several Vikings yelled at the top of their lungs, but it was not a cry for retreat. Several Vikings, probably those that taken more than a cup of mead took whatever they could find and turned into implements of combat. Tables were flipped over and turned into group covering shields, chairs and cooking implements become improvised weapons.

The Vikings charged heedless of danger, catching the dragons of guard with their unbridled determination and resourcefulness. The Nadders all lobbed their spines forward and shot their Breath in intense bursts, but it wasn't enough. The tables absorbed most of the their attacks, letting the Vikings close the distance before batting aside the Nadders with thrown chairs. It worked, letting them down one of the dragons before the others had a chance to really respond. Even then the other Nadders were being pushed back and pushed aside into a corner, the worst possible place to be in when facing the enemy.

And then I heard the one of the Zippleback's head speak. "I'm lightning the gas! Stand clear!" Both Nadder responded with cries of their own, confirming the message and approving of it.

A shiver went down my spine. "Get out of there!" I said.

But it was too late, the flame was lit and a blaze filled the room. An entire section of wall suddenly went missing as it went up in flame. The Vikings that were caught in the engagement suddenly found themselves lit on fire, their bodies being burned and wracked with intense pain. I think I might have joined their number if I didn't duck as just the right time to avoid the detonation. Several of the Vikings. ran in scattered directions, others though were less fortunate and were batted aside by the Nadders. Then, worse happened when more dragons, mostly Gronckles and Nadders showed up and entered through the enlarged breach the dragons made.

"Fall back!" declared one of the Vikings. "We'll fight them off, everyone else who isn't fighting, fall back!" Several of the Vikings who weren't already injured or on fire or worse drew their weapons and shields. Likely, those men and women owe their lives to their willingness to wait to get ready for combat...

I shook my head and did my best to avoid thinking of the image I saw. That was something I needed to deal with in my sleep, not right now. Right now, I had to get me and my friends out of here. "Right, you heard him!" Opposite of where the dragons came through was the door to the building. I went over there and beckoned my friends to go with me, planning to join the rest of the other noncombatants in leaving the fight. The fighting was hectic, chaotic and our defensive lines were being slowly over run. Staying here was going not the smartest move.

I turned back and made sure to see they were coming; I didn't want to lose any of my friends.

"Come on, let me fight!" declared Snotlout, still itching to get into

battle.

"Not here!" pleaded Hookfang. "Come on, Snot, at least get a weapon first!"

"And I would still have one if you didn't take my sword away!"

"You couldn't be trusted with it!" defended Hookfang.

"Stick with me!" Fishlegs said holding Meatlug's hand as he.

"Yeah, but doesn't that mean if one of us gets hit-" Meatlug wanted to point out.

"No, no, don't think about it like that!" replied Fishlegs.

Ruffnut declared, not sounding threatened. "Oh man, that was great! I love explosions"

"Yeah maybe we'll get to join right in!" declared Tuffnut. "You guys know where our gear is..

"Uhâ€|"

"No," both Barf and Belch said in their typical fashion.

Okay that was all of the ones in this dining hall, except, wait. Where was-

I turned my head all the way back into the combat between Vikings and dragons. The Vikings were currently losing, but only as far as ground and control of the room went; casualties were fairly even. And then, Stormfly decided to change that. She charged in, screaming at the top of her lungs. "Yaaargh!" She went forward and lunged her small sword out at a dragon that had chosen to try to take the rest of the Vikings by surprise by circling around back. "I gotcha!" she quipped and struck at the Nadder's legs, drawing cuts and leaving gashes.

The Nadder snarled back in reply, hissing. "Argh, you'll pay, but atleast now I get a chance to prove myself! I'll offer you to the King, Herd youngling!"

"Fat chance!" replied Stormfly. "And hey, you're not even a Squire, are ya?"

The dragon didn't understand her of course and went straight into fighting.

I didn't know what to do; I had no idea what possessed her to do this. At the same time, I couldn't help but want to cheer Stormfly on. Every time the Nadder dared to strike her, she dodged and ducked and made a lunge at the dragon's relatively squishy or otherwise all important lower half. As a Nadder herself, she knew of all of the blind spots, weaknesses, and failings of that body. She was no master swordfighter, but hey, she was way better than me.

I stood just a step away from the door, watching it all unfold in under thirty seconds. My friends went past me and into the streets. The dining hall wasn't the only part of the village that was on fire,

but at least being out in the open did not mean getting cooked to death by slow roasting flames. This was clearly an attack of some sort orchestrated by the Red Death. But why and for what purpose? Did the spy send word to destroy this place?

"Why won't you yield!?" complained the Nadder, his legs and lower body covered in welts and gashes from Stormfly's sword. Nothing fatal or major yet, but he was definitely slowing down the other dragon. And then I saw the dragon's jaw tighten into what can be called a grin.

It all happened so fast. Though the defensive line was still maintained, it had to give up more ground constantly. The only reason they were still here and holding was because there were people still being carried out of the building which due to the dragons inside and around it was now lighting on fire and slowly burning.

Unfortunately, Stormfly wasn't falling back with the line. At first, she had the Nadder on the ropes, but then, things turned out for the worse when the line fell back eight inches and then suddenly two more dragons joined in the fight.

She was overwhelmed quickly, the dragons tackling her by surprise and throwing her off balance with repeated fast strikes. While she was certainly good at swordplay, particularly at one-versus-one, she was certainly not that good at it and she taken down by being outnumbered. And then once she was weakened enough, the worst I could think of happened. The Nadder leapt up and slammed his foot into Stormfly's chest. She groaned and grunted in pain.

"Stormfly!" I yelled in a pained expression. I tried to run toward her, to do something, anything to get her out of her terrible situation, but I knew that I was powerless, weak. I was just a boy, a scrawny runt of a kid who was a toothpick in some dragon's mouth. If I had my crossbow, things might have been a different story, but even then I risked having Stormfly being caught in the blast or causing so much damage to the area it caused the roof to collapse. Oh, this was a terrible situation to be in.

Then, inspiration flashed into my mind; I remembered I had something that could help. I slid open my pack, remembering that the reason I didn't have a crossbow this time was because I had swapped it out for something earlier. I lifted a bluish-blackish cloak from my pack, realizing that maybe it was a good thing I was planning on surprising my brother earlier. I mean, I was thinking about changing earlier and so I thought I wanted to talk to him more about it, maybe help me get through the last of my hesitation. Well, I didn't need that anymore, the choice was clear.

"Hey, kid, you better pull out with the rest!" I lifted my gaze and saw an older man, his arm bloodied but held firm with his other hand. "It's too dangerous here."

I shook my head. "No, I'm fighting." I draped my cloak over my shoulders. It didn't change me, not yet. I still had to activate it.

The man gave me a funny look as if he couldn't understand me. or maybe he was looking at my gettup and thinking I had gone crazy.

"Sureâ€¦."

I didn't waste any more time with him than I needed to and I took over at running start Stormfly and her captors. She was still alive, mostly because the other dragons had taken to pinning her and because Stormfly kept trying to slash at them with a sword. "Stormfly!" I yelled at her and her captives, going toward them as fast as possible.

"Toothless?" she asked, bewildered.

"Is that a Herd child?" one of the Nadders said.

"Are they so desperate?" said another.

"Hah, he'll probably make a nice-."

And I pulled my hood down on my cloak and covered up my face. At first, I thought nothing happen and that the cloak was too far damaged to transform me at all. But then, I felt my body change. My body grew wider, my arms and legs grew stronger, yet more limber. My spine grew a tail and me body was engulfed in scales. And this all happened within the blink of an eye. Within one step, I suddenly found myself running on four legs instead of two. One moment, I was a human boy, the next, I was a Night Fury once more.

"-snackâ€¦" the dragon completed, stunned. And because my display left him surprised, I took advantage of the wide opening in his defense and tackled the dumbfounded dragon, sending him flying with my increased body weight into the wall. Oh, it felt so _good _to be able to do that again!

The other two dragons both gave me expressions of shock and didn't put up a fight as they pulled away, unable to think clearly at the sight they just saw. In fact, my transformation came so abruptly, so out of nowhere, that everyone in the room stopped what they were doing, including fighting and breathing to stare and look at me. The only people who weren't so awestruck were the people who already knew me. "Go get 'em Toothless!" I think it was Ruffnut who said this.

"Yeah, what she said!" added Tuffnut.

"Toothless," I heard Stormfly call out, her voice was a little weak, but she was still breathing.

I approached her and bent my neck down to bring my face close to hers. I gently rubbed my nose against her head, carefully reminding her that I was with her. "I'm here, and I'll protect you."

"Iâ€¦ I don't need protection," she said, a little wearily. "I just need toâ€¦ catch my breath." I smiled, almost comforted. I guess no matter what our forms are, Stormfly wasn't going to admit to needing my help, even if I was her friend. She tried to stand, clutching her body against her waist and grabbing hold of my side to keep stable. I really hope she was alright.

"Who-who are you?" asked one of the terrified dragons. They surprise had worn off, replaced by a dread fear of the unknown. Their bodies took on defensive stances, each form clinging just a bit low to the

ground.

I glared at the other dragons and stepped forward to meet the other dragons, making it clear I was not going to tolerate anyone so much as touching her. "Don't you remember me?" I snarled, my throat's growl like the rumble of a brewing thunder storm. "I am Toothless, son of Deadwings," I said. I wanted them to know exactly who they were dealing with, incase they forgot. "And I will not stand by and let my loved ones get taken from me ,not now, not ever again!"

* * *

><p>And now, both Hiccup and Toothless are changing. Toothless is now a Night Fury, but Hiccup's not too far behind him.

This upcoming parts are things I am looking forward too. There's important events in there.

39. Chapter 39

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

Alright, things are heating up. I'm looking forward to doing the next few chapters because they include things I've been thinking on for a while. I hope you enjoy them when they come out.

Read and Review.

* * *

><p>Loved onesâ€|Toothless may have meant something else than what I was thinking with those words, but the reassurance helped dull the pain. No matter what, he cared for what happened for meâ€| I could only hope that maybe something more came out of it when our lives weren't on the line, if only I could say what I wanted to say.<p>

I shook my head. No, what I wanted more than that was for my stupid arm to stop hurting. Thoseâ€| not-Squires tore a painful gash near the elbow, my blood dripping onto the floor in a slow motion. They might have been my Kin, maybe even distant cousins, but right now, all I could think about how mad I was at them. Now I was unsure if turning back into my true form meant if I could fly or not! I lifted my sword and gathered what strength I had just to keep holding it, anger and frustration would probably have to used just to swing it.

I gritted my teeth and turned to Toothless, his much larger body engulfing me, ready to protect me from all attacks. It had been so long ago since the last time I saw him as a Night Fury that I had almost completely forgotten this other side of him, a part of him he at one point rejected. I was too used to the slightly clueless, scrawny boy who liked to make things with his own two hands, it was too strange to even think of him Night Fury! Strange and infuriating, I didn't want him shielding me!

Toothless neared the Nadders, his growl like the thunder that heralded the storm, it was a promise of what he intended to

deliver.

"That's impossible!"

"There's no way that's true!" argued my Kin. "Herd are not Kin! You are not Dead Wing's child?"

"Am I not? How many other Night Furies you've seen? All of the ones in the Archipelago are in my family!" The Night Fury snarled. "It doesn't matter what you believe!"

"Then when was your naming ceremony?" snapped another of the Nadders. "I do not recall anyone with your name!"

The Night Fury growled. "Because I chose my own name. I refuse to accept and live by the King's traditions, his rules! He is no longer my Lord!"

A wave of sudden disbelief shattered the Nadders' concentration. The Night Fury went so far as to disown their ruler in front of them. "What you speak is insanity!"

"The only insanity is in following him in the first place!"

The Nadders approached him, wary of the power and arrogance he had. One of the Nadders attempted to breathe a lance of flame at the Night Fury, but in a swift motion, he shot the offending Nadder with a light pulse of plasma, not a major destructive blast, but a tiny blast of force no more dangerous than a fist. It was all that was needed though, the Nadder's balance was compromised and he felt his feet momentarily lose contact with the ground the moment before he made his attack, too late to stop. Instead of aiming at me and the Night Fury, the Nadder shot at the nearby walls, burning a crisp line of ash and dust into the other Nadders regarded the Night Fury carefully, clearly noticing how effortless he deflected their comrade's attack. They neared us, cautiously ready for the next time the Night Fury tried to make a harder hit.

I considered the Night Fury as well, just wondering if this dragon was the same boy I knew. It seemed as if Toothless had become completely different person, his body possessed powerful limbs that he had full control over. His mastery of his Breath was also something I probably never really noticed until now, enough that he was able to create the equivalent of a light 'tap' without a moment's hesitation. This Night Fury seemed too confident to be Toothless.

Which made it easier for me to rub my other elbow into his side and scold him for backing away from my advancing Kindred. "Come on, we can take 'em!" I held my sword tight, ready to swing and hit something.

The Night Fury growled. "No, I am taking you out of the fight! Why did you run into combat in the first place? The defensive line was falling back!" he scolded.

"Hey, you did the same thing too!" Speaking of the defensive line, I had completely forgot about them in the ensuing chaos. I turned my back at them, right at the exit. Their engagement might have broken down and stopped the moment Toothless pulled off his stupid stunt and

got everyone's attention. Strangely, I think a few of them were aiming their weapons right at Night Fury's backside. "Hey, easy with the weapons, will you? This guy's still one of you!" They hesitated for a moment, but turned their weapons onto the more relevant threat. I guess some people just weren't ready to accept people turning into dragons before their eyes. Fine, I can put off turning back later if it meant not getting skewered by a spear.

"Well, you did it first!" argued the dragon. He kept backing us further back. If it wasn't for the fact that I was forced to depend on him for protection in this weakened state, I would have shoved him aside and went back into the fray.

"Is that Night Fury arguing to that Herd youngling?" muttered one of the Nadders

"That Night Fury _was _Herd youngling a moment ago! Today is crazy!"

"Quiet you!" I snapped at the Nadder, lifting my sword and pointing it right at him. I did not have time for dealing with commoners, not even my own Kin. Then I turned my back at the Night Fury. "Look, Iâ€¦ I had to do it! Okay?" All I could look at was the burning building. There was so much fire and not everyone that was here was going to escape it...

The Night Fury eyed me for a split second but went back to watching the advancing Nadders. More came near us, they were the other Nadders that had previously tried to force their way through the Viking's defensive lines. They were itching for a fight, now that the Vikings were right out the door. "Weâ€¦ Let's deal with that later."

I silently nodded. Later, right. There was so much fire.

"Stormflyâ€¦.are you feeling okay?"

All I could saw a single word. All I could see was the blaze and the smoke. "Go."

The dragon quickly gathered its Breath and lobbed a destructive plasma blast, aimed at the feet of my Kin. The Nadders all panicked, realizing what the Night Fury intended to do, they all scattered heading out the nearest exit. Within a split second after he released his attack, the Night Fury swiftly my body with his massive wings, shielding me from the blast and shoving both of us out of the building.

There was a loud noise, an explosion that I could feel rattle my bones even as I lay on the ground, my body covered by the Night Fury's massive form. I tried to shove him off, to see what damage had been dealt. I _needed _to see it. "Get off!" I tried to shout, but it all was muffled under his massive chest.

But then, doing that felt easier. One moment, it was a Night Fury laying ontop of me, then another it was Toothless dressed up in a silly looking outfit that probably would have worked better in a different situation. "Uhâ€¦ hiâ€¦" he said, his face was a little cut, minor abrasions, nothing major. For a moment, I suddenly forgot why I was trying to force him off. I mean, he was a nice guy and all,

better than most boys I knew.

But then I remembered two things, the first being what I needed to see, the other a bit of an unspoken rule I learned from Astrid. "Get off!" I shoved him.

"Woah!" he yelped as he fell near my side.

I stood where I lay and surveyed the damage the Night Fury dealt, a sight that left me feeling liked a big gaping wound was being put into my heart. Nothing remained of the dining hall other than burning lumber and smoking ash. The dragons that attacked it had either escaped and flown above, joining... Oh no.

I felt presence by my side. Meatlug approached, her face every bit as haunted as mine. "It's happening again," she said somberly.

I nodded. It was are.

Barf and Belch were next, no longer appearing to be their usual cheery selves. They knew the same thing as I was thinking. "Except this time, " started Barf.

Belch didn't say anything for a moment. Barf had to elbow him in the side to get him to pay attention. "We are-" Belch added.

Then they completed together, "In the fireline."

I nodded. This time, it wasn't us doing the lighting, the burning. Me and my peers didn't want to think about it, didn't want to focus on it. It was too painful, to bother thinking about.

"That'sâ€¦ alot of dragons up there," said a voice approaching behind us. It was Hookfang, looking up at the sky, just as he said. There are our Kin in the darken skies all of themâ€¦|.

I sighed. Just when we were trying to avoid focusing on it. "Yes, yes it is." He was correct, there were lots of dragons in the sky most of them were still at the outskirts, the edges, preparing to reenact an event that I find distasteful now that I knew better. Thank you for pointing it out. "Hey, aren't you supposed to be with the others?" I pointed behind him. Toothless was having a hard time trying to explain the situation to the Vikings nearby him, their weapons were not drawn but there were more than a few wondering just exactly how a boy can turn into a Night Fury and back again. Fishlegs helped him out, but there was probably going to be even more questions when this was all over. Most of them weren't from Berk, so the extra reassurance would help things out. Snotlout was off sharpening a sword, meanwhile, the twins were off doing other things. Tensions were high for most everyone there and it wasn't just because our meal was interrupted

The Nightmare-turned-boy shrugged. "I wasâ€¦| just here to talk, well, given that our Kin are above us..."

"Don't remind meâ€¦| " I grumbled. If they were bees, they were swarming, hovering close to the settlement doing...

"What?" he questioned.

"Nothing!" I said.

I turned to the others, looking for opinions on what to say to him. He was one of us, a real dragon and one of the few others survivors of One Eye's new destroyed Flight. Yet, he was not like us. He was not there when it all happened: the burning, the screams, the destruction. Me and the other peers all took part in that, reveled in. We earned commendations, Glory, enjoying the satisfaction of ransacking and overrunning a the Herd's defenses. We talked about our favorite contributions, dreamed about the whole incident. The fire was bright our eyes! We looked forward to doing it again!

Now, I couldn't help but feel repulsed by those thoughts on that night all those months ago, back when humans were still the Herd, when Fort Sinister nothing more than a really big nesting ground for beasts. We all beared the guilt, the shame over our previous actions now that we know better, especially now that we've been brought back to here.

About my only saving grace was that Toothless was completely clueless and doesn't realize we've all been here before. Otherwise, who knew what'd he'd do to me. Probably try to get me to talk about it, though I guess I couldn't be that badâ€¦|.

"You sure!"

I shook my head, no, don't focus on it, I had face this. It is inescapable, the dragons, my Kin, were attacking, ransacking this place again at my former Lord's orders. I may not really identify with the Berserkers, but no one deserved this, no one deserved to burnâ€¦| "They're burning the village okay, that's bad, and we've got to stop them!" Hopefully the Nightmare wouldn't push the issue further.

The currently-not-Nightmare cringed. "So how are you feeling about-"

"Going up against them?" Meatlug completed. "Our Kin?" she said in a small almost quiet voice.

I nodded. It was one thing to side against the King whenâ€¦|. Toothless and his brother had their family utterly destroyed in front of their eyes, but up there in those clouds was likely members of my own blood, my parents could be right up there waging battle for all I knew. It was a hard decision to make, but it had to be done. "We have to defend the village." I had to put an end to the madness, I had to make up for it. No, we had to.

Barf and Belch looked at the each other, in the corner of my eyes. I saw them nod their heads together.

"We really shouldn't-"

"-take a side-"

"-but we-"

"-Mustâ€¦|"

They answered in sequence.

"They leave us no choice," I responded.

Hookfang sighed, "Yeah, they don't."

I frowned. It was times like these I wish I didn't side with Toothless. If only I liked him a little _less, _this whole situation could have been avoid. "I hate doing this, but we _must..._"

"I know, it's justâ€¦ awful. No matter what side we take, we might lose someone we know..." added Meatlug, summarizing the dilemma we all faced. "Say, why were those dragons attacking us in the first place?"

I shrugged. The force we faced in the dining hall was most likely an advanced scouting party, coming to probe for defenses. Being mostly made of Nadders, it was a nimble and quick strike force, the Gronckle was there to provide extra muscle and toughness while the Zippleback provided extra offensive options and area suppression. It was too Nadder heavy to be anything else, and really they only proved to be so effective because they lit the building on fire while everyone was still eating. So, what was their reason for attacking a dining hall? They clearly had some purpose there, otherwise they would have just burned the whole thing to the ground from the get go. Were they here to search for important targets? I mean, what was really important about us? We were all traitors, deserters, sure, but honestly were we really _that _important?

I turned to Toothless. He had finally managed to explain most everything the other Vikings needed to hear, even demonstrating his transfiguration a few times. So far, they were still a little uncomfortable with allying with a dragon, but Toothless had completely reassured them it was a disguise, a costume.

Thinking on it, both Toothless and Hiccup were the sons of Dead Wings, I mean, Valâ€¦ I know that when I was growing up there wasn't much in the way of healthy family relationships, but ever since this past winter, their family has gotten real closeâ€¦ If I were the King, I would... do something about it, maybe capture the two, just to ensure that she remained loyalâ€¦ and that meant he was a target. "No good," I spoke aloud after several minutes of silence.

"Pardon?" Meatlug asked. She probably forgot her own question.

I shook my head, no time to explain everything, I had to move on. "We have to keep a close watch on Toothless. Our Kin are probably focusing their efforts on him."

I received several blank stares, but slowly, one at a time, the group came to understand what I mean. "Oh, rightâ€¦" that was Meatlug.

"Yeah, He's-"

"-a big deal."

Hookfang stared down at his feet. "Very. Look, all we gotta do is convince him that he needs to lay low and hide somewhere safe. I mean just so long as-

And then I heard a loud roar, the warning sign of a specific kind of Breath attack just before it landed. A loud explosion struck one of the nearby guard towers, a siege catapult not too far away, reducing the defensive emplacement to falling rubble.

Toothless jogged a few steps towards the direction of the decapitated siege emplacement, stopping once he was the closest of the group to see the devastation.

I quickly moved over to him. "Toothless, what's wrong?" I asked. I knew exactly what's wrong with him and it scared me. Earlier he made a declaration of refusing to let anyone take me away from him; did I have what it took to do the same?

He turned to me, his eyes hollow, little streams of tears in his eyes. In that brief instant, I knew that there was nothing I could do to stop him from diving head first into danger; I had to follow him, I had to make sure he was safe. "I have to see my Mom!"

* * *

><p>Our Kin? I don't know what I was thinking when I said those words. I wanted to say dragons, but my mouth and my own heart told me to say something else. I don't know what's wrong with me. Ever since we last met my Lord I've started feeling uncomfortable in my own skin. I thought it was just my imagination, so I ignored it, but the problem has only grown worse since it started.<p>

I looked down at my palms. My left hand had started changing, fingers melting and rearranging to make room for the small talons that will join my future wing. I wasn't horrified, disgusted, or disliking the fact I can't hold my axe properly anymore. No, instead, I was looking forward to preening and tending to my own scales. Just what was wrong with me? Aside from the fact I was just blasted by lightning of course! Strangely, I think my hands were still changing, shifting. It was weird because, last I checked, damage received resulted in immediate changes that only advanced whenever I took my hits. It might have been a side effect of me the fact I had already completely turned several months ago.

I turned to Hiccup. My...boyfriend was busy discussing things with a large crowd of Vikings, all of them important Heirs or Chieftains to assess the situation. I was left out for very obvious reasons, and he was only let in because the Dagur was still looking forward to Hiccup's plans.

So far, Hiccup's chest was completely blackened noticeable through the gaping hole his clothes suffered, little winglets sprouted from his shoulder blades, and his hands grew claws. Strangely, I could swear he was also getting gradually taller, maybe I wasn't the only one slowly changing. Weirder than that, it felt so strange to think of him my boyfriend now, and that was after spending the whole winter as a couple! My gut feelings about it were that as a Night Fury, he wasn't compatible. Just there was something wrong with me, very wrong!

I stood, I had to get out of here, get some fresh air and not stretch my wings. Gah!

"Astrid?" Hiccup noticed me get up, turning his body toward me, his

expression a little worried. The conversation between him and the other Chiefs and Heirs had stopped to give him pause. None of them were particularly too happy about that. Well, that was fine by me. "Uh, are you feeling any better?"

I groaned. "Yeahâ€¦" I lied. Of course I wasn't, my head was a mess.

Dagur gave me a sly grin and stepped closer to me, looking me over with interest. "Hm, so getting zapped by lightning starts turning you into dragonsâ€¦ interesting."

"And cuts, burns, bruises, and getting stabbed in stomach," Hiccup answered off hand. "If we get hit hard enough, the injury pretty much heals back, but wellâ€¦" he didn't finish that statement, it was clear to all of us what he meant.

Dagur looked interested. "Hm, seems pretty good. How'd you do it?"

"Uh, let's not deal with it just now, I mean you don't want to be a Terrible Terror do you?" trailed off the Night Fury, I mean Hiccup. He was clearly talking about the potion, elixir orâ€¦

I scowled realizing my problem. Of course, the King the cause! Ages ago, I had signed an agreement with him to become "Kin", a dragon. Now that I've learned his deals are not to be trusted, I wondered if the great dragon had meant both in bodyâ€¦ and soul. The wholeâ€¦ mind sabotage thing hasn't come up until a few weeks ago when he showed us his true colors, but maybe there were other subtle hints I was not my own. Hadn't I started combing my hair more thoroughly as of late?

â€¦ It didn't bear thinking about.

One thing was for sure, when I got my claws and teeth on Mildew, I was going to do some things a female my age shouldn't be thinking of! I knew we should have just left him on Berk or put him under a rock! I was tidying myself up for the third time before dinner and that old fossil ambushed me. It was bad enough my head was a mess, now my body was changing. Who knew what kind of insanity would befall me when I completed?

I turned to the other Vikings, most of the others were scowling at me like I was something distasteful put before them, though others at least had some more pleasing or maybe sympathetic looks. Camicazi was always different, she waved her hands at me as if there was no danger or worry at all. "Good to see you up and about, Astrid Will you be joining us later?"

I gave the Bog Burglar a sheepish smile. At least someone here wasn't treating me any differently than normal. Plus, unlike Hiccup, I wasn't constantly having to force my head to think think about her the right way; she wasn't a Changewing to me, probably because I never seen her one except for in a dream. I waved a clawed hand back. "Yeah, in a moment."

That set off a few of the Vikings. "Enough is enough!" barked out one of the Vikings. He raised his sword and pointed it at me. "It's clear she's been feeding the dragons information somehow and lured them

here once she had been discovered! Justâ€¦ look at her!"

"Yeah!" piped up another, a red bearded man who was strangely short as a footstool. "No one may like that old geezer, but he's clearly got some proof if the dragons started showing up as soon as she was captured! She must be one of theirs!"

Mogadon the leader of the Meathead nodded his head in approval. "It certainly seems to be the case."

"Dad," his son commented, rolling his eyes. I think his name was Thuggory. "We don't know that!"

"Non-sense! How else do we explain the dragon attack just now?"

"I don't know, coincidence maybe?" the Meathead Heir shrugged.

Camicazi piped up. "Hey, I've been checking on her the whole week! I saw nuthin' suspicious from her! I got a few lady friends who can attest to it!"

"Well of course not, Camicazi!" blared her mother, Big Boobied Bertha. "A good spy is well aware of people watching her! I taught you that!"

I blinked. "Wait, there's a spy?" I don't think I've heard any word of it there being spy in our midst. I probably should have been told, sometime, I mean, the topic seemed to be something that the Chiefs all knew about. I turned to Hiccup, skeptical. I should have been told. Did he really not trust me that much to warn me about that? Or was I on the list too?

Hiccup seemed to cringe and scratched the back of his misshapen head awkwardly. "Well, there was kind of a rule not to talk about that in front of everyone, you know, riots and allâ€¦ Keeping the peace, not cause people to devolve into needless sword fighting." Hiccup didn't trust meâ€¦.

Dagur snorted. "Hey, I would have been fine with that, but I guess if it keeps my fleet from decapitating _itself_â€¦."

"See!" Camicazi shouted, pointing a finger at me. "She doesn't know! Look at her reactions, this is probably the first time she's probably heard about this funny business!"

"That could be very good acting, girl!" Bertha raised a finger, as if in a scolding tone. "And it's not like a good spy need be aware she is one!"

Camicazi sighed, as if she was already tired of the conversation. "Mom, for the last time, you can't prove that that trick works!"

"And then there's the fact she's turning into a dragon..."

"People, people!" Hiccup stepped forward standing right in front of me. "Whether or not she's the spy, we've got bigger things to worry about. Most of our forces are off holding the dragons at bay, but something has to be done about them. We can't justâ€¦ sit

hereâ€| "

Several of the Vikings nodded in compliance; I got a bad feeling from them. "Right. Let's just axe the girl! If she's the traitor, well, that's one less problem!"

"Hey!" I snapped. I went to go grab my axe, but then I remembered that Mildew caught me off guard when I didn't have it on. Just another reason to claw out his eyes. I raised my fists up, unafraid. "If you got a problem with me, say it!"

Several other Vikings narrowed their eyes. They drew their weapons and made a slow advance. "We definitely got a problem..."

"No one is killing anyone!" Hiccup raised his hands in front of them, as if to block something. "She's not our problem right now!"

"Hiccupâ€|"I nearly growled. I didn't feel to thrilled about my so-called boyfriend coming to my aid, not right now. He didn't trust everything to me. Maybe that voice in my head that told me I was a Nadder was right.

"Astrid, please don't do thisâ€|" he whispered. "I'llâ€| I'll think of something."

Camicazi quickly dashed to Hiccup's side, sword in hand, ready right in front of me. "Hey, look, Astrid's been through enough, yeah? Mind getting her back?"I guess if there wasn't anyone who I was particularly upset with right now, it'd be her. Though I am a _little _upset she didn't tell me about this either, then again not as upset as the time she stole my cabinetâ€| the whole thing.

"Camicazi!" snapped her mother.

Even Thuggory went over to my side, further blocking the advancing Vikings. "Look, I don't really know if she's the spy or not, but come of, if she was, how'd she get in contact with the Red Death or whatever?"

His father shrugged. "Magic?" as if the answer was obvious enough. Strangely, it was an answer that made perfect sense given what I knew about my Lord. I guess Meatheads weren't just meaty on their torso's and biceps.

I sighed at all of this insanity. I hated being accused of something I didn't do and I hated that my friendsâ€| and the soon-to-be-Night Fury... _had _to step forward in my defense. I don't remember doingâ€| anything they were accusing me about. Then again, was I fully in control of myself these days. Would I remember betraying myself if I was compelled? I gritted my teeth, no these Herd were insulting me for thinking that. "Hey, I didn't contact anyone, I don't know why my-" I almost said 'Kin' there, that was condemnation narrowly avoided. "-the dragons are out there! I had nothing to do with them!"

But no one listened. It might have been my appearance that set me apart from them, Hiccup and I were slowly detaching ourselves from humanity. I gritted my sharpened teeth, cutting parts of my gums, I probablyâ€| No, I did not look better as a Nadder. Gah!

The Vikings stepped toward me and my friends, me and my companions all aligned themselves and got ready for the warrior's impending approach. The Vikings who stood by and did nothing watched, their expressions uneasy. About the only one who seemed to be indifferent about the whole thing was Dagur, who was lazily waiting for the situation to resolve itself. "Ah, you can take 'em right?" he asked the partial-Night Fury, almost jokingly. So much for bigging Hiccup's ally, though I got the feeling it was him getting back at the Night Fury over something that happened tonight. "I mean, you can survive getting your arms chopped off!"

Hiccup nervously cringed. "Well, I did lose my legs once. Dad kept the old ones in a pickling jar somewhere in the houseâ€¦"

Dagur almost burst out laughing. "You kidding?"

"Dragons!" a voice cried out, interrupting that discussion before it could go any further; much to my relief. It was another runner, entering the room, gasping for breath. "They've taken the walls!" shouted the man.

A silent wave of realization and sudden clarity washed over everyone, so clear and tangible that I almost felt like I could touch it. We all stared up above us, My Kin were close by, taking the Berserker's territory, their den from them. It was terrible to lose control of the walls, our defenses were compromised.

Dagur stepped forward, looking almost relieved to hear it. He went over to a nearby table and picked up a crossbow and started to test it by aiming down the sights. "Good, I could use a little target practice, I was getting bored of waiting for you guys."

Meanwhile, I looked over the nearby Herd, regarding them warily. There was an uneasy silence and stillness that fell between both groups. We knew that there were bigger issues to deal with than just me right now. "Let's deal with this, later, when there's no dragons flying overhead," recommended the partial-Night Fury. At least from time, he had good ideas, it was quite charming. And no, he's my boyfriend, not a _Night Fury! _I think I might be going crazy at this rate!

The Herd all nodded silently and solemnly. They knew the stakes. "Rightâ€¦" drawled the one that resembled a dwarf. "I guess we can."

"Good!" Camicazi quipped, sheathing her sword, a playful smile on her face. "Maybe after fighting a few dozen dragons would be a good warm up, huh?"

Bertha wasn't quite so thrilled about her daughter defying her and sighed. "One of these days, Camicazi, I gotta find you better friendsâ€¦"

Thuggory and his father stayed silent, looking at each other with stoical visages. I got the feeling there was a bit of estrangement or disappointment there.

I took a sigh of relief at least they were not unreasonable. Not enemies, but I should at least defend this territory; I was a guest.

I shook my head. I am so going to need to fix my head somehow after thisâ€¦|.

And then, in a recurring series of interruptions, I heard something heavy land onto the roof. It might have been made of stone, but I could still hear a big thud originate from above us. Everyone in the room turned stopped they were doing and turned their gazes above.

"Uh, not again!" said the partial Night Fury, in what must have been annoyance. "Everyone move back!" he waved over directing everyone to stand out close to the throne.

Cracks formed overhead and several people quickly dashed out of the way while loose stone tumbled toward earth. I was among the evacuees. "What's happening?" I asked Hiccup, steeling and readying myself. It was most likely, a dragon trying to bust through the throne room to search for defenseless Herd. I gritted my teeth and felt my throat vibrate into growls; well, it was going to be sorely disappointed.

"A repeat of something that happened way too long ago; I'm just glad it's not Toothless."

"What?" That made no sense.

"I'll explain later!" he promised and picked up the nearest set of equipment he could find, sword and shield holding them close to his center of mass.

A large section of wall collapsed and then, the solid crimson head of a Monstrous Nightmare, the largest I have ever seen poked its head through, scowling and growling as it overserved everyone in the whole room. Itsâ€¦| his eyes burned into white hot pinpricks of light. No, I wasn't being metaphorical, his eyes had this white hot glow to them, clearly not a natural part of the Nightmare arsenal. Was this one of the King's gifts?

He stared at all of us, giving the assorted Vikings plenty of nerves and tension to work through. When he turned his gaze over me, I felt like my breath had been stolen from right out of my lungs, as its gaze was a destructive fearful force in its own right. And then I saw it turn its gaze to the being right next to me. It eyed Hiccup, looking at it intently, very intently. There were almost no other indications about the newcomer Kin's identity, but I didn't need any; I knew who it was.

"Gotcha!" Dagur shouted and aimed his crossbow over to the dragon, but at the last second, I intervened.

"No!" I shouted and knocked the crossbow out of the Berserker Chief's hands, tossed him onto the ground, and quickly turned the sights of the weapon to him. I saw the Nightmare pull his head from the ceiling, leaving me in a room full of angry Viking Chiefs and Hiers.

He stared at me, almost confused over what just happened. Several of the Herd stepped close to me, their weapons drawn and threatening the end my life. I attacked the Host, butâ€¦| I had no choice, I had to or...

"Astrid, put it down!" I heard Hiccup snap. He motioned to have the warriors surrounding me drop their weapons in desperate moves of his hand. "Hey, everything's fine, it's just reflex.

I stammered, trying to explain. "But that Nightmare, he's-

"I know!" he said, almost cold. I felt my insides break. He knew.

I handed him the crossbow, its weight feeling unbearably heavy in my hands.

He handed it back to Dagur who received the crossbow with an almost bewildered look. The Herd warriors nearby hesitantly put their weapons away now that the Host was no longer threatened. "Uh, what what was that about?" the other young male wondered.

Hiccup sighed, looking at the entrance from where the Nightmare was originally. I knew it was heartrending for him to admit it, especially to a group of Herd that were already mistrustful of us. But the fact of the matter was, that Nightmare not normal and clearly received some sort of boon from our King; I had little doubt he was the new Flight Commander.

"That was!" There was a silent pause, it was like everyone already knew what he was going to say. In fact, they probably already knew; Mildew practically told them. "...my Dad, Chief Stoick."

40. Chapter 40

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Okay, this chapter took slightly longer than expected. The second battle of Fort Sinister is underway and now we get to see how the groups divvy up their time.****

****Enjoy****

* * *

><p>Great, just great. The one day Hiccup decides I get a day off from watching him and lets me go off and see Meatlug over dinner, the entire village gets bombarded by hordes dragons for the second time. I'm starting to wonder if I'm cursed myself. Now I'm really starting to get why Hiccup once said his life was Loki's doing; because honestly, everything feels like the result of one big cosmic joke. And I was the butt of it!<p>

"Fishlegs?" I heard a voice call out. It was Meatlug from right behind me, coming right into my peripheral as she stepped forward to match my base. "Is something bothering you?"

"Oh, nothing much!" I replied, feeling a little sheepish. I did not want to talk about this stuff right now, I had too much on my mind as it is. I shook my head; I should be the one asking her questions, to put my mind at ease. "You going to go do what I told you?" I checked over her shoulders, watching as others banded together. I hoped she

would do the sameâ€¦ unlike a certain Night Fury and Nadder who decided to leave us behind.

Meatlug frowned, pursing her lips. She knew what I really meant. "I should," she said, turning to the groups behind us. "But shouldn't I, you know, at least do something?"

I shook my head. I wanted her to get as few opportunities to get hurt as possible. She did not need to be exposed and out of the open in a burning village. Unlike Stormfly, she was not combat trained in her human form. I know she probably trained a whole lot more than I ever did in her real form, I know from experience that none of that skill translated that well into using the human body for fighting, especially with minimal weapons and no armor. It would have been worse if she took off her amulet. The moment she turned into a Gronckle, the Berserkers and any other Viking would see her as nothing more than another trophy fit for a wall; I did not want that to happen. "No, don't."

"But I-"

"I know, I know!" I hated the fact I had to say it, but it had to be done.

She cringed for a moment, a little tear dropping off of the pit of her eye. She might have had a natural armor rating of five plus in her normal form, but I knew her insides were just as vulnerable as my own. Even worse, I knew why she wanted to get into this scuffle. I knew of her story, she told me. I knew about how she started to feel like she really fit in as a Squire after ransacking Fort Sinister, about how she finally felt like she earned her place. Now, there was a deep regret about that past; I know I would have that, if I went through the same thing.

And now, I was being forced to break the heart of the only girl, dragon or otherwise, I had a chance with. Why did I have to be the one to deny her her choice? "Meatlug, please, you have to go!" I turned her around, showing her the evacuation in its last stages of preparation. Men and women formed groups, banding together to protect those unfit to fight or contribute to the defense and lead them out of the siege. Meatlug belonged among the evacuee, leaving Fort Sinister before she ended up getting caught in the crossfire.

She frowned, her appearance and stature faltering. I was denying her the one chance she had to make things right between her and the Berserkers, and it was tearing her apart. Meatlug sniffled a tear, her voice quaking. "But what about you?"_

Oh, Freya, why did it have to come to this? I grabbed hold onto her, bringing the large girl close to my body and keeping her close. I hoped this wouldn't be the last time I would ever get to see her, hold her again in this life. "I-I'll be safe. Just don't worry about me!" I lied, trying my best to sound confident about it. I knew my chances for survival were slim, really, really slim, but I had to hope.

Meatlug nodded her head, seemingly believing my words. How much worse of a boyfriend could I get? "You will?"

I took her hand into my own, and held tight, not wanting to let go.

"Promise. I'll be right behind you, watching the rear. That's fine with you, right?"

She held on tighter, wanting the same thing as I did. "Yes, I- just stay close, alright?"

I wanted for us to stay holding each other for an eternity, we felt like we deserved that much. Unfortunately, the dragons did not feel the same as we did.

"Fishlegs!" shouted a loud voice. Confused and bewildered, Meatlug lifted our eyes to the voice's direction. It was Snotlout, his hand raised with a weapon in hand, but with no shield in his left. Instead, his offhand was pointing at some other direction, up above our heads.

I turned to look at the indicated direction. To my horror, I found a small contingent of dragons descending toward us, their mouths open and releasing goutts of flame. My reflexes kicked in; I had to protect Meatlug at all possible costs. I covered her body using mine as a shield, I didn't want anything taking her away from me, not even other dragons! "Fishlegs!" Meatlug cried.

And yet, why wasn't I on fire and screaming while I burned to a crisp? I blinked and turned towards the dragons. They were obviously breathing fire toward us, their flaming breath hitting me right in my face. Except, I did not even feel a thing. I could see the fires near me, wrap around me, yet I couldn't feel a thing other than my eyes straining from the intense light. I rubbed at my eyes, trying to clear my vision

It took me a second to realize making strafing runs toward us, yet none of their fire reached me or Meatlug, dispersing harmlessly around them in a globe a foot less in length from us. And then I remembered that Snotlout was next to me, explaining everything away. "Yeah, who's the man!" declared Snotlout; he knew he was responsible for saving us. He flashed me a smile, indifferent about the fact that there were dozens of dragons overhead and the fact there was literally nothing their firebreath did for them! "So, what'd you think?"

My mouth gaped open. Well, I got saved by Snotlout. I guess after putting up with years of getting pranked by the guy, I earned the right to get my butt saved from him. "Uh, thanks, Snotlout!" the words felt so alien in my mouth. It's been so long since it's been brought up, I think everyone ended up forgetting he also had a little bit of talent for making magical items, well, item.

"You're not the only one who's confused by all this," I heard Meatlug whisper in my ear. I silently nodded my head. Out of the corner of my eyes, I could see several men and woman gaping at us. In fact, several dragons were also pretty confused, making weird noises that I assumed were confused commentary.

"No problem!" smiled the other boy. And then with a jerk of his hands, he forced me down onto the ground. "Watch out!" he barked. Just over head, I could see that a Nadder's clawed feet just barely missing the space where my head used to be.

I stood and patted the dirt off my trousers, keeping an eye out for

any dragons that tried that stunt again. I guess just because Snotlout's little talisman can disperse fire, it didn't mean other means of attack were barred from dragons.

"Wow, that almost took your head off!" commented Tuffnut approaching. That wasn't a fun thought.

"Nuhuh! That foot wasn't angled right for it!" replied Ruffnut. She glared her brother.

But before they could get into another of their usual spots, Barf and Belch intervened. "Uh-

"-Guys?"

"Incoming-"

"-danger!"

They all ducked to the side, scattering out of the path of much larger dragons. They then took out their weapons, Barf and Belch taking out a bolas each and flinging them towards and nearby dragons in a wildly flurry. Tuffnut and Ruffnut drew their weapons and shields to fight off the incoming dragons, acting as a buffer and drawing any attention to them while Barf and Belch provided support. I guess they were used to messing around human form, so it was a boon for us right now.. I got the feeling they were feeling thrilled about the whole thing.

They weren't the only ones who went off into fighting either. The other Vikings, the adults who were all mostly huddled up trying to guard the noncombatants joined in the fray as well. "There's no time, we gotta move!" There was so much chaos and fighting everywhere, but the Viking warriors held their ground and provided what cover and defense they could to the fleeing civilians.

Hookfang came up from behind Snotlout. Like Meatlug, he really hadn't spent much time readying up his fighting skills. He held a mace and shield in his hands, but he wasn't holding them up for a fight, rather it seemed like it was a delivery.

Snotlout smiled as his friend carried the equipment. He slapped me in the back. "Look alive, Fish! We've got some fighting to do."

I took Hookfang's mace and shield, their weight giving me the feeling of comfort and safety in my hands. If there was ever a time I wanted to fight, now had to be a first. "Thanks."

Hookfang nodded. "Don't mention it." He then turned to Meatlug, expecting something.

Taking the shield and strapping it over to my left arm, I also turned over to Meatlug and put my free hand over her shoulder. "Don't worry, go on."

She hesitated for a moment, but Hookfang took her hand; she didn't put much of a fight after that.. "You'll be alright?"

"Promise!" I declared.

And that was when I felt a powerful blow strike my cheek. I lifted my hand over my cheek and felt the warmth, the tingling sensation. I smiled.

Meatlug smiled. Then without a word, she went off to join the rest of the evacuees. I knew she was going to be safe, I just knew it. So long as I stood guard and stood watch.

Snotlout rolled his eyes. "Well, fine, whatever, let's just get the show started!"

For the first time in my life, I actually felt like I wanted to fight. But it wasn't about me defeating a foe or getting another treasure to put on a fireplace. I had a purpose, a reason for fighting. I had to keep my Meatlug safe. I took my mace, feeling a surge of warm strength running through it. I was never much of a good fighter, but I was not going to let something like that deter me. I could only hope I would be enough...

I dashed forward, tailing the fleeing group of refugees and joining the ranks of the warriors that watched their flanks. The dragons were in pursuit of us, but our group headed into tight roads, using the packed together, yet still burning buildings as cover, blocking both dragons that attempted to snatch up and unfortunate Vikings as well as their fire breath.

A few of the smarter, faster dragons, mostly Nadders went ahead and tried to cut us off, but there were so many of us that they that were overrun for trying. It certainly helped that even though the evacuees were not so well trained that they counted as full time warriors, a good chunk of them were well armed and ready for the engagement. Spears in particular tended to be a favorite.

In retaliation for that attack, several of the warriors took shots at the pursuing dragons, striking at them from a far with anything they could throw. But their panicked aim barely hit anything, only managing to strike down a handful of the advancing dragons.

"How you keeping up?" declared Snotlout, not sounding afraid of anything. His grin was still showing, aimed right at me. The dragons had pretty much given up any hope of trying to blast at anyone near him with their breath weapons and more often than not were forced to head in for a melee, even though doing so meant sacrificing their speed and maneuverability. Strangely, I didn't find not getting burned to a crisp all that good.

"Swell!" I blocked incoming Nadder spike with my shield. Oh boy, I am so glad none of them were as quick on the draw as Stormfly. "It's a shame there's not any more of them!"

"Yeah! I'm getting bored!" agreed Ruffnut.

Tuffnut yawned just to emphasize the point.

Barf and Belch both shrugged at each other; they clearly understood what I really meant. I guess the twins were probably even less versed in sarcasm than dragons.

If I wasn't so caught up trying to fight for my life, I would have rolled my eyes. Instead, I yelled out something completely unrelated.

"Duck!" I ducked just in time to avoid the flaming debris of a wagon nearly strike my temples. The dragon responsible for that then came charging at us, jaws open with the threat to attack.

In a sudden flurry of motion, I tackled the dragon and shoved it aside before I even realized what kind of dragon it was. I think it was a Nadder—so does that mean I passed my strength test? I turned back for only a glance, noting that the twins did their part to subdue it.

I'm not lying to myself when I believe this was the most capable I had ever been in my whole life. I know that I'm actually quite strong for my age, I mean, that burst of strength I pulled off a few months back wasn't something that I pulled out of a hat. It's just that, well, I never really knew how to use it like that—| at least not until now.

I kept advancing forward, heaving closer and fighting my way towards the senior and more experienced warriors. Me and my friends were mostly at the rear of the whole group, dealing with the one that took us apart from the rear or leftovers that the better warriors dealt with or avoided as we headed past. And even then, not everyone was keeping pace with the others, the battle was taking its toll. And I was afraid of...

I shook my head, no, don't think about it! Everything was going to be fine if I set my mind to it! I was not going to let anyone get in my way.

To take out my frustration, I ran towards the nearest dragons, caught in a stalemate that against several other Vikings. I don't know who they, were or what rank or station they were, all I know was that I had a target. The dragons were all caught off guard when I slammed my shield into the nearest one. It cried, whimpered, and yelped from the attack, but that was just the beginning. I didn't bother pulling back my shield, no, I just kept pushing against the dragon, insisting I that I went through it and its team mates. They all fell to the ground, pushed out of my path like they were nothing but rag dolls. "Yaaagh!" I roared at the top of my lungs.

But I still wasn't done. I needed to work through this, to do more. I dashed ahead of my friends, feeling like I could do so much more. The next dragon that was in my way was a Nightmare that decided to lunge at my head. I raised my shield to strike at the dragon, but it broke when I slammed it against its side. The shock of my shield breaking pushed my be back a bit, but I still pushed through. I raised my mace in retaliation at nicked it in the chest, my blow packing enough power to knock it out of the way any let me through. I think I heard a loud crash behind me, but I didn't turn and look.

"Fishlegs!" I heard Snotlout snap at me for some reason, but I ignored it. Probably wanted to rub it in about how much fun he was having from all of this.

I doubled my pace and kept going. I felt whatever surge of power I summoned was beginning to fade and I wanted to be as far up ahead as possible when I finally slowed down.

With the last of my strength, I nearly got into the middle of the group. The pack of evacuees was thinner now, but I think that had to

do with the fact that we were all so disorganized and that some of us tended to be quite fast when motivated. The Flight of dragons that were overhead was also sparse now, just in time for our protective cover to run out. They probably didn't deem us worthy enough or too troublesome to capture, most to my relief.

My breath was heavy, my pace was slow. I felt so tired after that, I needed a break. Turning my head, I noticed there was someone going the wrong way. At first, I thought it was some warrior who was looking for more fighting, but then I realized she didn't have any weapons on her, despite her large size. "Meatlug?"

"Fishlegs?" she turned to me, her expression exasperated. "Did you see Hookfang?"

I stopped. we were mostly safe out here, but just the same I kept a watch for any incoming dragons from the skies. "No, I didn't." Up until just now, I was too focused on fighting. surviving to have noticed anyone that wasn't a dragon tried to tear my head off. I "Why, I thought he was with you but."

"Well, he was, up until that last Nightmare showed up and then he went after her!" She shook her head nervously. "Oh, those two really have some issues to work through."

"Nightmare?" I paused, cautiously.

"Yeah, you see her?"

"I uh..." I hesitated. In my head. How did I put this in a way that actually you know, made sense. I mean, I barely believe I seriously wounded the Nightmare with only a single hit and I was the one who dealt the deed. I think I was having migraines just trying to comprehend what I just did. Even worse, Meatlug sounded like she knew the dragon. How was I supposed to deal with the fact I might have seriously injured what might have been a good friend of hers?

"Yeah, we saw it!" Tuffnut claimed.

"Yeah, Fishlegs took it down with a single hit!"

Great, just before I could put any tact to the situation, the twins come in and ruin it.

Meatlug stared at the twins, her gaze confused, her expression being all the opportunity the twins needed t

"You shoulda seen Fishlegs here!" exclaimed Tuffnut.

Ruffnut shook her head vigorously. "Yeah! He plowed through several dragons like they were uh..."

"Crops!" Tuffnut supplied. Ruffnut seemed to like the suggestion and slapped her brother's fist with enthusiasm.

"Yeah, like that!"

"Then he beat up the Nightmare and sent it crashing into a single hit!" finished Tuffnut.

Meatlug's expression was that of shock, her gaze turning to me with a look of horror. She turned to the other newcomers, Barf and Belch for confirmation, but they stayed silent.

I felt like bolting then and there, ashamed. Yup, the one time I end up doing an amazing stunt like that, I end up causing my girlfriend to regard me like I had just killed a friend of hers. In fact, I was pretty sure that I atleast ended up bruising the Nightmare. I am really the butt of a cosmic joke aren't I?

We all turned our gazes to the sky, just as we heard a loud cacophony of roars and cries, thankfully, it took attention away from me. Those of us who couldn't understand dragons speak, turned to those who could. "It seems like the dragons are regroupingâ€|" muttered Barf.

"They'll be approaching down our path by the sound of itâ€|" Belch added.

"Heyâ€| where's Snotlout?" I asked. I realized just then that out of the few of my friends that still stuck with us, Snotlout was the only one who was absent.

"Oh, him?" Ruffnut shrugged indifferently.. "He's with the Nightmare!"

It's times like these that I should really wonder if I could actually make a case about how cursed I am.

* * *

><p>"You don't have to do this," I warned the Nadder. She flew right beside me, covering my left flank. I really wished she wasn't there, but at the same timeâ€| I wanted someone I trusted to give me backup; she fit the bill.<p>

"I'm not asking for your permission," Stormfly replied, angling her wings forward to boost her speed. "I'm here to make sure you don't end up getting yourself killed!"

"That;s oddly hypocritic coming from you!" I barked back, not particularly serious or threatening, just stating a fac. She was still injured from the fight earlier, but still airworthy. Still, she needed to make sure she didn't strain herself too much, I could see the patches of irritation on her wing's membranes. It was risky going into combat with it, and I was worried for what might happen due to a spell of bad luck.

Stormfly dismissed me, giving me a look. "And staying on the ground was somehow less dangerous?"

I turned my gaze down below, realizing how right she was. The entirety of Fort Sinister was covered in combinations of dragons, fire, Vikings, and the sounds of pitched combat. Dragons torches the place, sending entire columns of flame against the Viking's ranks, often setting something _or someone _alight. In response, the humans retaliated with volleys of spears and arrows, taking down a score of dragons with their strikes. It was not a pretty sight; the last time I seen anything like this was during that siege a few months ago, the

one I never took a part in other than sinking a few unmanned ships.

The only reason Stormfly and I were not caught in that crossfire was a result of our speed and the fact that neither of us were sticking around engaged in a fight; we were lucky that the >Vikings or dragons who could do a thing about us had other issues to attend toâ€| which illustrated Stormfly's point quite nicely. "I guess, but you should have went with others and fled to safety! That's less dangerous than getting caught in a burning city, flying or not!"<p>

"And let you get yourself killed facing your Mom! No chance!"

"Hey! She's not our enemy, you know that!" Even after the spending the winter justâ€| spending time with my family, I still found it a little strange to defend my Mom of all things.

Stormfly sighed. "Okay, let me rephrase that; your Mom's pretty nice, _Dead Wings _is not!"

I frowned, perfectly understanding what she meant by that. I recall what Mildew said about my Mom getting twisted by the Red Death. From my experience with Hiccup that one time, I knew perfectly well just what that entailed. Who was to say that when it was all said and done, my Momâ€| would _still _be my Mom. My Mom wouldn't do any of this slaughter willingly.

I shuddered at the thought. "Let's just find her first!" I called out. It was easier to act on that goal, rather than to think about what could happen. Our target was a Night Fury, one with a very distinct call that has been ingrained into my very heart; we needed to get to her, no matter how much I didn't want to.

It was then we both heard loud and powerful roar, senseless my Mom's battlecry. With my sharpened senses, able to see fast high speed movement, greater range of vision, even at night, I could see it all happen right before my eyes, a feat impossible with limited human vision. In the distance, I saw a tiny silhouette covered by the forms of other dragons zip past one of the siege towers. A small ball of explosive Breath was shot out. And then tower broke into three different chunks and fell to pieces.

Stormfly immediately responded. "I think that's her!"

In the time it took Stormfly and I to take to the skies, we were quite behind. Mom took down several siege towers, breaking the defenses in a single hit with well placed blasts, leaving the Vikings vulnerable to her assault. It took us this long just to get to her. Even still, we both knew there was still more to do that just to show ourselves. What made matters worse was that there was a practical swarm of dragons all over the place making

"She's about to take another one!" I shouted. Mom was flying towards one of the nearby towers raising her altitude before preparing to dive bomb the emplacement to take it out. It felt as if my heart was being pulled into two separate parts; a few months ago, I wouldn't have as much hesitation other than fear if I ever her. Now, I just didn't want to hurt someone so close to my own heart. My wings did not want to cooperate, I couldn't go to stop her.

But a certain Nadder had less fear than I did. "She's not!" Stormfly sped up with a burst of speed, diving towards the swooping Night Fury, heading at break neck speeds at a collision course. She slammed into the Night Fury's side, throwing her off balance and redirecting the blast so that it hit somewhere else along the ground.

My mom yelped in surprise, spiralling out of control for a moment before aligning herself. She eyed the Nadder, confused. "Stormfly!" she barked. She clearly knew who the Nadder was, which made me feel even less hopeful. "What are you doing here!?"

"I should ask you the same thing!" responded the Nadder. A part of me really hoped that things would end well for Stormfly.

I heard my Mom growl. "I am leading my Flight, just as I always have! You do not belong here! Leave at once!" She then fired off a burst of light at the Nadder a warning shot, that much was clear to all those involved..

"Mother!" I declared, hovering closer into view I didn't want to make things get any worse and I hoped that showing myself might deter Mom or Stormfly from making some rash decisions.

"Toothless!" the Night Fury eyed me, looking at me quite concerned when she saw me. "Child, what are you doing here? How are you- why are you a Night Fury!?"

I felt my cheeks turn flush red. I think this was the first time Mom saw me as a dragon since way back in our old lives. It was different, an odd sensation, like I was in a sense ashamed of what I was in front of her; I knew she didn't particularly like her days as a dragon. Admitting that I turned myself into a felt like I was practically insulting her. "Doesn't matter! I'm here to take you home!"

She frowned. "I can'tâ€¦ I have duties to do."

"But you have duties to your family, too!" said the Nadder. "You shouldn't..."

Mom sighed, turning to the Nadder. "Iâ€¦ the King has spoken his orders."

"That doesn't mean you should follow him!" snapped the Nadder.

"In fact, he's not even worth following!" I added, raising my voice to the highest peaks. "All he's ever done to us was get our family twisted into shredsâ€¦ and use us."

"Don't say that!" snapped my Mom. It wasn't a command, at least, not an angered one. Rather, I couldn't help but feel her reply was a little too quick. Mom, what's going on?

It was at this time, the other dragons from nearby noticed their Flight commander was no longer leading the fight. They were veritable swarm, hovering around us in a large sphere. "Dead Wings, is that your son?" one of the dragons declared. "Why is heâ€¦ speaking about our Lord in such a manner?"

"And what about that Nadder? She tried to take you down, what would you have us do to her?"

Mom looked hesitantly at the other dragons, pausing for a moment. "Nothing, just carry on with your duties. This is a family matter."

"But Flight Commander," another dragon said. "They're wanted rogues, we can't justâ€¦"

"You can!" My snapped, her angry flaring to a height that I was sure I hadn't seen in ages.

The dragons all shifted back, several immediately went back to fighting. Only the bravest stayed back, several I recognized were Knights under my mother's control. I couldn't help but feel a little better about myself. I knew the King regarding me as an enemy spelled bad news in many senses, but on the other hand, it was worth letting him know that I opposed him. I was perfectly fine with being a rogue, an outlaw in his eyes.

"We can't allow them to go unharmed!" snapped a large, Nightmare. He might have been related to Hookfang, given his size. "Something has to be done, for you know the penalty for defying the King's direct orders!." Several of the dragons neared me and Stormfly, ready to pounce at a moment's notice.

Stormfly kept her eyes locked on the other dragons. Meanwhile, I tensed up my muscles. Something around fifteen dragons wanted a piece of me and my friend. It was much more than I would have preferred, but on the other hand, I wasn't too afraid of them. I was outnumbered, but I wasn't outmatched. I felt like I could take 'em.

"I know, I know!" my Mom responded, grabbing her temples. She then turned to me, and then back to the Nightmare. "I will need to discuss things with my son first, but until then, I will ask you not to harm the Nadder while I am away."

I blinked, confused for a moment.. "Mom?" I questioned her. I was willing and able to get in a fight, but now, I couldn't help but feel a little off balance. Just what was she planning?

"Go ahead!" declared Stormfly. "I'll wait here."

The other Night Fury nodded. "Yes, thank you for understanding."

I hesitated for a moment, but I had come to realize now might have been the best time to take to my Mom, maybe, make sense of this confusing mess we've gotten ourselves into. "Um, alright."

"But we can't just â€¦ allow this meeting," said one of the other dragons.

"We can," insisted the elder Night Fury. "Our King sees nothing wrong with parley."

"But-"

The older Night Fury gave a threatening growl and barked out an order, one that was so forceful that I lost control of my wings

momentarily. "I have spoken; do not test me!" It was a strong, commanding order, that I felt it rattle my bones and cause my insides to quake.

At that, several more of the dragon left the group, now we were surrounded by only a dozen, Mom's Knights I figured. I wondered just what was going on. Mom was clearlyâ€| herself, she wasn't asâ€| aggressive, forceful as she once was, not to me or Stormfly; yet she still commanded the other Knights as if nothing had happened during the winter break. She was still one of that monster's lieutenants!

I turned to Stormfly wondering what she thought of all of this. "So?" Could we trust the other dragons.

She turned her gaze, knowing my thoughts just from my expression alone. "Do not worry, Toothless. I'll be fine, rogue or not, our Kin still upheld Honor, they wouldn't break that responsibility.

I nodded. It made sense, dragons, especially Knights , upheld obligations to high standards. But my dealings with the Red Death showed the flaw in that; the spirit of the rules was easily avoided if the letter was still upheld. "If only their King was as trustworthy," I spat bitterly. He might have not have been here, but I was going to firmly cement my place as an enemy from here on out.

Several of the other dragons looked at me with snarls and half suppressed growls. I glared back at them, ready to take them on, but nothing happened. "Toothless, now isn't the time!" commented my mother..

I glared at the other dragons for a moment longer, but then I turned to my Mom. Right, I had more important things to do; I could deal with them later. "Okay, let's talk then."

"Toothless, come with me." Mom swooped downwards, moving close to the

The land below was under heavy siege, its streets ran red with fire and blood. The devastation was incredible and senseless. I hated that it all had to happen, but I really saw no way to stop this madness on my own. Few places down there were safe, even though I was the strongest I had ever been in for ages, I knew I wasn't invincible. Still, there were places, safe little spots that had been abandoned and overrun; just because the Vikings on Fort Sinister were larger than usual due to the Thing, that didn't mean they were everywhere.

Mom and I found a safe place, one in a section of the village that had completely fallen under the dragons' control. It was a small but heavily damaged building, probably some unfortunate family's house. The roof had completely collapsed and caved in while some walls had caved in from what must have been a really large dragon crashing into the building. There wasn't much in the way of smoke or fire, though it was very obvious that anyone who lived in the building was not present at this time.

I turned upwards, able to see the few dragons that circled around Stormfly, watching her every move. Even with the chaotic frenzy of scaly wings moving the dragons back and forth, I could still see them

all. I really hoped Stormfly would be safe up there.

"Such a interesting female," I heard my mother comment.

I nodded silently, agreeing. Then I turned my gaze upon the other Night Fury, seeking answers to all of my dizzy questions. "Mom, why are you here?" I asked, fearful of whatever response she could give me

The other Night Fury sighed. "I was afraid you'd ask this first."

"Why shouldn't I ask that first?" I howled. "Mom, last time I saw you, you justâ€¦ bargained yourself away just to buy me and my friends a headstart to escape from that _monster's_ clutches right after he imprisoned Dad! Now, it's been two weeks later and I find you're still working for that creep. What else was I supposed to ask?" I might have been a little more forceful, more aggressive than I would have been ages ago back when our relationship was strained, but I just wanted to know what what going on.

"I had no choice, I had to make another pact." "The other Night Fury looked down at the ground, a deep sadness and grief crawled up onto me. It was so strange to see that face in the first time as an equal and to not see a perpetual scowl on it. Even now, I couldn't stop seeing my own mother there.

"What agreement is worth all of _this_?" I felt exasperated. I turned my gaze up to the heavens and then to the poked my gaze out a nearby window. Dragons swarmed in the skies and the streets, barely a fraction of the total destruction and carnage all around us. Mom clearly know about what I was talking about; she was the cause. After all, she had years of experience.

The other Night Fury's voice felt so heavy, like it was being weighed down by something. "I didn't agree to any of this just because I felt like it! I did it for our family!"

I gritted my teeth together, a surge of of anger welling up inside of me. "Like what you did for me?" I spat. "Fourteen years, and you never bothered to tell me! You never told Dad or bother either! There had to have been a better things to do justâ€¦ selling yourself like this!" I hated the idea that Mom was forced to to perform such vile stunts just because of some stupid agreement she made for some minor benefit.

Mom's gaze looked at me in the eyes. There wasn't any fire, any rage in them, instead I could only feel a sort of resignation.. "If only it were that easy, I would have just gone and left his service years ago."

"And you still serve the King as a Flight Commander," I pointed out. "Tell me mother, what could he offered you to sink so such monstrosity?"

"The chance for us to not be monsters, even if temporary."

I blinked, not understanding. "What do you mean?"

The elder Night Fury shook her head. "Child, it's not just myself I

have to worry about now, you know that."

All of my anger drained out only to be replaced with a cold realization. There was someone else I knew the Red Death had taken from me... "Wait, you're talking about Dad?"

Mother nodded her head. "The King gave me his word, so long as I remained loyal, he will continue to allow me to leave his duties every winter, along with one another."

"Dadâ€¦" the words escaped my lips. My body was that of a dragon, stronger than ever, yet I felt so weak. My inside felt like they were freezing up.

"Every winter, he and I would be free to do as we wished, but until then, we are the King's servants, whether we want it or not."

Why? Why Dad was _also _serving that monster? Did anything the old man say ring true? "Wait, why is Dad on this too? "What happened to him?" I asked.

Mother looked away from me and said these words, "He isn't himself."

I took a step back. Great, just when I thought the Red Death's plans couldn't get any worse for usâ€¦|.

41. Chapter 41

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

Tonight was supposed to be a good night. I would have had a nice hot meal with some of my closest friends, something nice and enjoyable enough to take my mind off of that eerie helmet Mildew rummaged from Odin-knows-where. Who tries to find something like that? I just wanted to forget about things while Ruff and Tuff went for third third arm, well, _everything_, wrestling contest during the night while gambling with on the victor with Barf and Belch. Hookfang wouldn't take part, but at least he shows up and helps us sort things out. Then we would have gone on and passed the time with silly stories that really happened and plans of how to spend the next day. It was the good life, as far as I was concerned. Who cared about anything Mildew did or anything I dreamed of involving Astrid so long as I was alive and awake?

Of course all of that got interrupted the moment the dragons came, but honestly, I actually found the change of pace refreshing. All this time spent just sitting around and waiting for things to happen, that bored me. I came because I was promised a chance to show off myself with the Tribal gathering, but ever since Toothless showed up, I've gotten moved down on the whole Chieftain thing, and then kicked out of Dagur's feasting room. It was kind of a shame, since I did sort of like the guy.

However, getting the dining hall invaded by dragons made that all worth it. I welcomed the chance to get my blood pumping and smash something in the head with a mace or cut it with a sword. _I was a Viking_, blood, glitz, and glory were my elements and I welcomed it.

There was chaos, death, destruction; what more could I want? My friends certainly seemed to enjoy themselves, well, at least the twins did. I know that some of my friends kinda equate dragons like they were other Vikings, but _come on_, Vikings went to war with each other _all the time_.

Another surprise I found worth while at the time was that even _Fishlegs_, the former worst Viking _ever_, managing to somehow end up demolishing dragons left and right by just by wanting walking through them. That act alone made me think that maybe, just maybe I should add him to my crew, my inner circle. Sure, he was the friend of a friend, but come on, a guy like that seriously needed to use the gifts he's been given. I even cheered him on, as much of an oxymoron that sounded like. That all changed the moment I saw him do something that I just don't think I could forgive.

I surveyed the wreckage of the house. Several of the walls and the roof collapsed in on itself. I slowly approached the destroyed building, watching my corners and guarding my flanks with nothing but my steely resolve. The one time Fishlegs does something truly _Viking worthy_, he decides he would want to go off and knock a friend, well, acquaintance, of mine into a building. That guy seriously had a death wish.

The dragons overhead had mostly chased after the rest of the group, but I could see off in the distance they were planning on circling back now that the others were too far out of their range. I didn't worry about a dragon's flaming breath roasting me alive; I had a way to protect myself against that, but that protection didn't cover everything a dragon that paid attention could do to me.

I stood over what remained of the door's threshold and peeked right in. The area was too dark and there was just too much debris everywhere to really see much of anything. It was times like these I wish I still had my eyes as a Monstrous Nightmare, just so I could see what was going on.

Suddenly, I felt a hand grab onto my shoulder and I immediately jerked it away only to slam my elbow into whoever grabbed me. It was too light to be a dragon, I noted. I spun around, brandishing my weapons and pointing them right at the offender.

"Ow!" groaned a taller, dark haired boy. "Snot- my liege, was this a bad time?"

I rolled my eyes. It was only Hookfang. I offered a hand. "What are you doing here?" I half-grunted. "You should be out of this fight!"

"Butâ€| but my sister!" he stood and patted the dirt off of his trousers.

I turned back into the wreckage, suddenly feeling guilty. Right, Hookfang was her brother; he had a responsibility towards her. I can't deny the poor guy that. Besides, maybe I could use a hand. She was important. I stepped out of the way of the threshold, even though I didn't need to. "I'll watch your back."

Hookfang nodded his head solemnly. He wasn't armed or armored and both of us knew he was going to be a sitting duck out there. He

stepped inside with a moment's hesitation.

I entered right behind him, keeping my guard up for any other dragons that would have stuck around. I was only interested in Hookfang's sister, though I admittedly can't really explain why. Then again, I think it might have been the fact it was the mating season when we met; she was also a good rival as far as I was concerned, someone I could test my skills against and compete with. I mean, wow, come to think of it, she's basically like a draconic Astrid...

Up close, it was easier to see that there was a large shape buried under a mountain of wood. The dragon still hadn't left this place, still trapped. For a moment, I thought she might have died, but I could feel a low noise and a distorted, pained groaning from underneath the wood. "She's still here!" I quipped. I dropped my weapons and began tossing as much firewood aside as I could. I had to make sure she was alright. "Quickly! Get her out!" I ordered.

Hookfang didn't waste any time complying. He dug through the wood and rummaged through it like he was some sort of burrowing creature. "I think I can see her head!" he complied.

But then the large mass of debris rose, the pile of discarded and damaged wood being displaced in a sudden motion. A large dragon's head was the first thing to poke out but instead of words of greeting or thanks, a gout of flame burst forward wildly. Hookfang narrowly avoided getting singed by his own sister's flaming breath, a stroke of luck made her completely miss the guy.

"She's up!" I cried in almost absolute joy, moving towards the other boy. She was alive and she didn't appear to be harmed. "You okay?"

The Nightmare's head rocked back and forth in random directions. Did she even hear me? "Where am I? What happened?"

"She's disoriented!" said Hookfang.

I frowned. We couldn't get her to safety in this state. When I saw Fishlegs again, I was going to give him a piece of my mind.

I stepped forward and approached, planning to get her attention. After that happened, getting her to safety or treating whatever injuries she had was going to be no problem. "Hey! Over here!" I waved.

The Nightmare's head slowly stopped moving so wildly and slowly focused in on my direction. She noticed me though she was still not directly looking at me. Her vision might have been still clouded or blurry.

"I'm right here!" I said. I picked up a discarded shield and then hammered it hard with a mace, ringing and clanging it as loud as I could. She was definitely going to notice me now!

"Snotlout! Don't do that!" Hookfang practically shouted.

I looked at him innocently. "What? What's wrong ab-"

And then her sister breathed a gout of flame right at me. I raised my shield up to block it, out of sheer reflex, even though I really didn't need it to protect me. After the flames harmlessly dispersed around me, I recalled I still had my trusty fire ward.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you that we _hate _it when people do that?" Hookfang yelled. "Loud, clanging metal messes up with a dragon's sensitive ears!"

I shrugged a shoulder, the other holding the shield up. "No, I _kinda _missed that lesson!" Or if I did take it, I ended up being too far distracted by say, Astrid missing to noticeâ€|. I immediately shoved that thought right out of my head. No, don't think about it.

The Nightmare hastily stood from her resting stop and then quickly slammed a wing into me, her entire body weight acting like an oversized sledgehammer, taking advantage of the fact I was distracted by a matter that I didn't want to think about. That attack sent me to the ground, as my shield barely did anything and my ward did nothing. "Herd warriors have come to finish me off! I will not let them!" declared the dragon.

"We're not here to kill you!" I shouted.

"She doesn't understand us!" Hookfang replied.

Stupid dragons and humans not understanding each other's language! Why wasn't it so much simpler. "That's a running theme for all the girls I know!" I tried to get up and out but Hookfang's slightly older sister wasn't letting that happen. She buffeted me with her wings again, knocking me backward as I pushed myself away from her. I kept my shield up, both hands holding it firm, blocking her attacks since she seemed pretty determined to break through my defenses. "A little help here!"

"Working on it!" Hookfang tossed a brick at the dragon's head. It bounced off harmlessly, shattering into pieces on the floor.

The Nightmare snarled and growled, turning to her brother. "The other dares strike me?"

"Hey, Sis!" waved the other boy. "You know how you always beat me at tag? Well, I'm betting you can't catch me now!"

The Nightmare didn't seem to understand what the other boy was saying, but I bet that if she did, the result would have been completely the same. The dragon turned her body around, and knocked me around with her tail with one heavy hit before moving in to pursue the other boy. Hookfang jumped out of the threshold and began a desperate run for his life.

Using the time Hookfang bought me, I quickly checked the damage his sister did to me. My left arm was beat up for the second time. It wasn't bleeding out or anything, but it was times like these I wished that I could still heal as fast as I use to. I cracked my swollen knuckles and flexed my trembling fingers. It hurt, it wasn't rapidly mending, but it would have to do.

I rushed out of the destroyed building, hoping to give Hookfang a hand. I might have wanted to know his sister more, but what kind of a

liege would I be if I let my underlings get beat up like that?

To my luck, Hookfang was still ahead of his nameless sister, the other dragon attempting to chase him on foot, not exactly the Nightmare's strong point. Hookfang, perhaps due to knowing about his own weaknesses, evaded at just the right angles to avoid her attacks, ducking and leaping over flame, avoiding the larger dragon's wings. He really seemed to be doing a good job, but it didn't last.

Fights are not won by going on the defense or evading an enemy's blows. Sure, a firm defence meant that you could survive to land a killing blow, but that doesn't mean you _win. _No offense meant that your opponent could whittle you down a little bit at a time. Hookfang stood a good job evading his sister for a while, but eventually she got lucky.

One successful swipe with her arm-wings later, she had her brother pinned to the ground. She roared a terrible noise that even sent shivers down my spine at this distance. Hookfang attempted to struggle, coughing and choking with his face to the ground.

"Hookfang!" I shouted. Now things were really dire. If I didn't do anything now, the only guy in the world I could really call my best friend was gonna die. But if I did, I might lose favor on the only other girl just (blank) This was a terrible nightmare and not the monstrous kind!

I ran over to the dragon and slammed my shield at its side, I didn't have time now to pick up my mace. Oh, if only Fishlegs was here and could just shove her off. "Sorry!" I said with every hit. I was being torn between saving my friend and not hurting her!

But she wasn't going to be deterred. She snarled and growled. With a single motion of her wings, she tossed me aside like I was nothing more than a rag doll.

I slowly picked myself up, all of the enthusiasm and energy sucked right out of me. Was I really so useless?

Without any more distractions, she then turn to her captive and gave him a thick and heavy sniff. I had vague, terrible ideas of what was going on her in mind. And then an odd thing happened. She squinted her eyes and tilted her head in a bewildered gesture. "You smell like my brother" she commented.

My heart leapt, there was still a chance. "Hookfang, your necklace!" I can't believe I had been so stupid. If she couldn't understand human speech, then the answer was to get dragon speech and who was a better expert at at talking like a dragon than a dragon?

Hookfang gritted his teeth and quickly pulled off his necklace and tossed them at my feet. Within the blink of an eye, the boy I had grown so used to seeing sharing the bed across from my own disappeared, in his place was a large dragon. "That's cause I am..." he said.

With his newfound size, the other Nightmare no longer had the she mass to crush him under her wings. She jerked back startled, eyes rapidly blinking in disbelief. "Brother, what are you doing here!?"

She shook her head as if to retch it from uncomfortable thoughts. "I knew you liege was involve in all thatâ€¦ nonsense, but you've decided to partake in it as well?"

Hookfang turned his body and bowed his head what must have been shame.. While the other no longer towered him, she still had this air about her that made her _feel _larger. "It's not too bad, once you've gotten used to itâ€¦"

"Not too bad!?" yelled the other Nightmare. "You turned yourself into one of those lesser Herd creatures! That's demeaning!"

"Maybeâ€¦" half-admitted my friend. He turned to me before going back to his nameless sister. "But it was pretty much the only way I could continue to serve my liege and lord at the time."

The other Nightmare turned to me, squinting her eyes. I came and approached, both of my hands behind my back as I gave her a sheepish, almost innocent look. "Hi there!" I said in the most feigned tone I could manage. I really hope she didn't have any choice words to say to me.

She sniffed me down before scowling. I took a step back, knowing she wasn't pleased. "Oh, so your liege ordered you to kill me? Is that how far you've fallen?"

"We weren't going to kill you!" exclaimed Hookfang.

"Then why did he threaten and disorient me with his weapons?"

"Because as much as I like working under the guy, he is a bit of an idiot."

I gave Hookfang a look.

"Well, you _are!" _

Hookfang's sister rolled her eyes. "I don't believe this. My first official tour of Squireship and I meet you here. You do realize that I've got orders from our King to dispatch you both for being renegades."

"I figured," Hookfang kept his gaze to the ground at his feet, not wanting to talk things too much with his sister.

She gave a deep sigh as if tired and used to this. "Honestly, brother, look at this mess you've gotten yourself into. Maybe if you turn yourself in, I can convince our King to grant you amnesty. You could finally go home!"

Hookfang looked at his sister and shook his head. "I'm not going back."

The other Nightmare's head rapidly shook, eyes fluttering as if to shake out the disbelief. "What?"

Hookfang didn't break away. "I don't know what you've heard, but I quite like it being among the Herd. I mean, yeah, it's a little hectic, but at least I got to unwind, meet people who atleast care

about my well beingâ€| " He turned to look at me. "Even if they tend to be a little abrasive about it."

I gave the big dragon a big manic grin. Okay, for that, I've got to pay him back for this sometime. Maybe with that new bed or something.

His sister reeled back in exasperation. "You what?" She gritted her teeth together, well as much as a dragon could. "When I get back to the Flight Commander, I'll bring a legion of our Kin to escort you back to our King!"

Hookfang frown. "Sister, I don't think that's going to happen...

The female Nightmare squinted at her brother. "Can you possibly be any more- Hey! Get off!"

It was then I lept into action and grappled onto the larger dragon's neck. She shook violently, but I held firm. This might not have been covered as part of usual dragon hunting, but I had to improvise. "Hookfang!" I called out to my friend.

The other Nightmare slammed into his sister and kept her off balance. She kept flailing about, breathing fire everywhere, but no one was caught in the blaze.

I wriggled my way around her, managing to climb onto her back. "Keep her steady!" Hookfang managed to maneuver himself into such a way that one of his feet grabbed onto the other dragon's tail, while a wing kept the other dragon's wing pinned.

"You can't hold me for long!"she cried, but that was just enough time for me to work my plan into action.

See, when Hookfang decided to reveal his true form, I didn't let his amulet go undisturbed. I held up the silvery jewelry in one hand, my balance and grip slowly atrophying away into nothing. But with one daring act, I managed to drape one side of the chain over the Nightmare's neck, that was all I needed. While I knew the necklace _should not_ fit a dragon's neck fit a dragon's neck the way it did, I didn't particularly care about the method that was done. that was something for eggheads like Fishlegs or Hiccup to care about.

The Nightmare shrank, her from losing scale and muscle and wing and sinew in a rapid pace. Dark hair like Hookfang's grew in place of vanishing horns and the dragon's anatomy slowly shifted into a form I recognized more belonging to a girl roughly my age. In the last moment, she managed to throw me off, causing me to land on the dirt.

By the time I managed to stand up and turn myself, she was done, the Nightmare was reduced to a mere teenager. "What did you do to me? I-have to get out!" she cried and tried to stretch her arms and jumped in the air. But she no longer had wings.

She fell onto the ground, hard.

I cringed. She wasn't going to like me after this, wasn't she? "Hey! Easy there!" I said, approaching her. But then I suddenly realized that I really shouldn'tâ€| not in her current condition. I averted my

eyes and tossed my jacket over her at least making her easier to look at. "You might need this."

She groaned in pain, looking at her new hands as if she was confused about the new appendages. Her fingers twitched wildly, unstable in their movements. "What is this? And what is this for?" She seemed out of it, dazed. Maybe she hit her head or something. Hopefully nothing permanent.

"Hookfang." I said. "Get me something!"

The large dragon nodded his head and moved towards one of the still standing houses. Hopefully whoever lived there would understand my need.

I continued to look at the new girl. The new human fumbled about, her expression dizzied and her movements poorly thought out. She wasn't fighting us. not like this.

I turned my gaze skyward, looking for threats. As a human, she was going to be treated like any other, a target for dragons to poach. Even worse, as she was right now, too addle minded to think of running away, she wouldn't put up much of a fight, not like she did for me and her brother.

Following that thought, I realized something that sent chills up my spine and nearly killed something inside of me; she was perfectly willing to kill me. Sure, she didn't know it was me at the time, but to her, I was just another human that needed to be put down all for the sake of acquiring fame and fortune, much like how I am perfectly willing to kill a dragon or two to advance myself...

I quietly put that thought away. There were dragons I needed to fight still. The next wave was still coming.

A!A!A!A!A!A!

So now my Dad was a dragon. Great, just great, Hiccup. Aren't we just one big happy, scaly family? All I wanted to do was set things right, make our lives better by just ending the division between us. Never did ever consider that any of that would involve taking my Dad to be imprisoned and turned into a dragon against his will and having him lead an attack against several Viking Tribes!

I ran forward, shield on my right hand. Small orbs of flame shot into my direction and struck the side of the shield, breaking my only defense like a piece of wet parchment. Gronckles advanced down the nearby corridor, getting nearer with their buzzing wings. Sending more shots of flame my way.

I nearly ended up getting blasted to bits or worse, changed even further had someone not intervened and slammed me against the wall and away from the blaze. "Uh, thanks Astrid,"

My girlfriend, slowly approaching being a Nadder looked at me sternly. "Come on, we can't keep your Flight Commander waiting!"

"No," I replied. I really hope I was wrong about Astrid being the traitor, I mean, for one she keeps talking like a dragon would. I

guess for now, I was glad she was on my side, but this really brought up so many issues I hoped weren't going to be a problem. My girlfriend got off me and handed me replacement shield, just in time for me to use it to block another incoming hit.

In response, one of the Gronckles all charged full speed and readied to tackle into us to take advantage of my weakened guard. Only to be thrown back by another Viking tackling into his side. Thuggory slammed the dragon against the wall and sent him stumbling back a few feet by smashing the dragon's leg.

Camicazi came up between me and Astrid, holding a replacement sword for me. "You know, I'm starting to wonder if there's such a thing as _not _having an adventure when you're involved!" she winked.

Astrid sighed and lightly pushed the girl back a step. Camicazi acted like she enjoyed it. She shook her head.

Thuggory then took cover behind a nearby wall, avoiding a sphere of flame heading in his direction.

"I think we better go!" I said, hiding as well. There were like twenty dragons and four of us. I know all of us, well, excluding me, had a good track record as far as combat went, but come on, we weren't _that _good to deal with to deal with these dragons and any other dragons we'd meet latter.

No one, not even me, thought running away was a bad idea. And that was an achievement in of itself.

We dashed down a different hallway and thankfully ran into a line of patrolling warriors. Their leader looked at me intently as we ran past them, but ended up focusing on the line of Gronckles. "Take 'em down!" He cried. Axes, nets, and a bolas or two flew off at the Gronckles, but none of us stuck around to see what happened next.

We didn't need to. Everywhere we looked, everywhere we turned, Fort Sinister was flooded with the chaos and rampant destruction of pitched battle, made worse by being a very enclosed space. For the most part, only Nadder and Gronckles ended up getting in, but occasionally, there were Terrors sowingâ€| terror throughout the ranks. There was nothing safe there, only the promise of fire and clanging metal.

And yet, unlike a sane person, I was leading Astrid and my friends through ever increasing waves and danger just to go find my father. "Are you sure we're heading the right way?" she asked.

"No!" I admitted. If this was my Mom I was chasing, I would have been very sure that she would take out any siege towers like she was a living piece of artillery. Dad on the meanwhile, had no real pattern in his attacks, leaving behind nothing but a trail of devastation and destruction without any rhyme or reason. The only reason we were able to follow him at all was this odd foreboding feeling that I knew where he was. I mean, it was also this very feeling that let me know it was really him. "But I have a good idea."

Thuggory rolled his eyes, sweat dripping from his face. "Sometimes, I really wonder if you're really the guy who actually does have the best ideas around..."

"Hey, I never claimed my ideas were any good!"

"And yet they work!" chirped Camicazi.

I smiled at the girl.

Astrid elbowed the other girl and they seemed to exchange a look at each other. Thuggory just sighed although I couldn't help there was a look of a faint smile ahead.

I smiled was glad to have them by my side, even if this was a dangerous task. Thuggory and Camicazi would without a doubt have to face the wrath of their parents when this was all over. Astrid, too, had her own little unique brand of worries and issues, things we'd have to deal with later, such as her odd behavior and choice of words in the past week.

Thankfully, Dagur was too busy defending his fortress to take part in this little escapade. While I've warmed up to the guy a little more than in the past few days than I have in entire years, I was still a long way from considering him a friend. Still, would have been handy to have him shoot down any attempts to have me murdered by any other Chiefs that didn't quite like the like of a partially dragon freak, but hey, I guess having Thuggory and Camicazi at my side more than made up for that.

Speaking about being partially dragon, now that the bindings that the King bestowed upon me had fallen, I was slowly returning to being a Night Fury. The rate was so slow, it was barely noticeable, but I knew Astrid and I were changing, even without having been hurt to speed up the process. While, I might have accepted that I might never return to human form way back when I thought undoing the spell was impossible, I still didn't feel all that comfortable of having to turn back. At the very least, I had the benefits of slightly improved coordination and...average Viking strength, so I could at least hold my sword without its weight dragging my whole arm down, but that was a small comfort to the fact that my hands were slowly becoming too stiff to hold the sword in the first place. Oh well, I guess not being stuck between two separate forms like some sort of bizarre mishmash was good enough to stay positive about it.

Just then, my sensitive ears picked up a noise, a low rumbling noise that resembled a threatening growl, except with more "boy" language in it. "Come closer, boy."

"It's him!" shouted Astrid. "We're getting close to the Flight Commander!"

Thuggory looked at me and Astrid for a split second. "You sure?"

I gulped down the knot that built up in my throat. I didn't like the idea of facing my Dad after only Odin knows what the King did to him, but maybe, just maybe I can talk some sense into him. I mean, I was still his son, right? "I am."

We sprinted a few more yards until we ended up in another one of the hallways, though this one was more spacious than most of the others and had windows installed to show the outside world. Strangely, there didn't seem to be any signs of a struggle of my father

anywhere.

"What? Where is he?" My eyes moved in every direction. I heard him come from right here and it wasn't like a dragon that big would be able to hide just anywhere! The place was dark, sure, but I had Night Fury vision. Where could he have gone?

Thuggory and Astrid slowly scanned their gazes as well, though I knew only my girlfriend had the best shot of seeing anything I missed out on.

Camicazi moved and approached one of the nearby statues of Cheifs past. "Hm, I don't quite the look of dis."

"Yes. The Flight Commander should have been here or at the very least a contingent of our Kin." Astrid commented.

Thuggory glowered, turning to the girl, squinting. "You know, whenever you talk like that, it really creeps me out."

Astrid frowned. "Same here."

I tried to tune my friends out, focusing my senses and the feelings in my stomach. Something didn't quite feel right, about all this. I mean, where was Dad? I mean why would he call us here and not show up.

Camicazi and I turned to each other, both realizing it at the same time.

But it was too late. One of the walls suddenly burst open into a shower of rock as a dragon's head punctured through.

I raised my shield and stopped the wreckage and rubble from getting into my eyes. An agonizingly powerful roar echoed in my ears. I lowered my shield just in time to see the openings of the battle unfold.

Camicazi, Thuggory, and Astrid all looked up at the newcomer, their expressions locked into steely gazes that could have broken down armies. Yet the dragon didn't feel like showing them any response other than a cold, hard stare. I could only look in fear for I knew who it was. "Dad!" the words escaped me and I suddenly felt very weak.

My father crawled in through the destroyed section of wall, the hallway just big enough to support his new form. I wasn't really sure how I could tell it was him, but in the deepest parts of my heart, I knew it was truly him. As the King and Mildew had promised, he had become was a Monstrous Nightmare, though he wasn't completely normal. His eyes were white hot pinpricks of light, like little stars that burned brightly. His scales were mostly red, except the for the blackened stripe pattern that almost vaguely resembled chains. His neat was too thick, his body was too muscled, overtoned as if his bulky muscles transferred into his new wings.

Stranger still was the very air around him seemed odd. His image appeared to be slightly distorted, like there was a quiet, invisible blaze that surrounded my father's body, bending appearance around him. It certainly felt like it, the air was almost unnaturally

warm.

And then his eyes narrowed; he wasted no time launching an attack. The dragon's launched a scorching beam of flame, hot enough that the very stones his breath touched glowed red with raw heat. My friends avoided the attack and closed in, weapons ready and cautiously approaching, the intense and unseeable blaze around my father's body made him all the more difficult to deal with.

Thuggory went first, lunging in with an overhead chop. My father backed away his head and evaded the attack. He then buffeted the Meathead Heir with his wing and sent him flying backwards. Thuggory rolled a few times on the ground and adjusted his fall to land on his feet.

"Take off your jacket!" I shouted at him.

He looked at me like I had had said something quite odd. His face was reddened, like he had been in the hot sun for a few hours.

"Just do it!" I said, pointing at the reason why.

The Meathead Heir then looked at his left shoulder and saw the small begins of a fire, right over his shoulder. He hastily took it off and tossed his jacket aside. He looked at my father with a newfound respect and wariness.

"I don't know what's happened, but my Dadâ€¦ he's burning hot!"

The dragon looked at me narrowing its eyes, intently, a low guttural growl emanating from its mouth, like a feral predator. But those eyes told a different story, one of almost burningâ€¦ intensity and controlled forethought.

All of that set Astrid and Camicazi on the defensive. They regarded my father carefully. Dad however didn't let them the time to get to so much as think. He went after Thuggory again, since he was distracted he tackled the Meathead hard enough that he slammed into the nearly wall. He didn't stand up after that.

I moved quickly towards Thuggory's side, keeping my shield raised and ready for another one of my Dad's attacksâ€¦. though a sinking part of me knew that the shield was not going to offer much protection from him. I checked the Meathead, noting that his eyes were closed, but thankfully he was at least breathing.

Another column of intense flame was launched at my friends. The girls evaded, but that attack turned out to only be a diversion. Dad's head quickly lunged forward and went towards Camicazi.

The Bog Burglar, always favoring mobility very rarely so much as bothered carrying a shield broke off from the engagement with a quick backwards step. "And here I was thinking meeting your Dad be easy!"

I sighed, "Trust me, it never is!"

With Thuggory out cold, I finally worked up the resolve to join in the fray, keeping my shield up ahead to block the invisible and ever present heat. Astrid joined beside us and stood in front of my Dad's

head, making sure she was front and center when he decided to make a counter attack. Although Camicazi was certainly trying her best to get his attention as well. "You know, Mum used to say you had a hot temper!" Though my father never really acted on that annoyingness, only so much as uttering a low rumble growl..

We all went in at the same time. While in normal times, I would have never so much as dreamed of actually fighting my own Dad, but I had no choice. I tried to strike my father's side and Dad let me do it. my sword dug into his flesh a half inch, drawing blood, and opening a shallow cut. But father didn't care about that. He only cared about the opportunity that I just let him have. I suddenly understood that the whole point for calling me was for me to get close to him.

He leapt over and slammed a wing down at me, trapping me beneath. "I have you now." He said to me, sounding so cold and practical. My body ached and burned both from the physical strain of his weight and muscle on top of me, but also the faint and constantly burning invisible heat that permeated the air around him. Though, admittedly, the heat grew slightly less painful with each passing second..

Astrid and Camicazi took advantage that my Dad was now kept to one space. They attacked with their weapons, just fast enough to avoid most of the heat and my father's frantic counter attacks. He bled and roared in every direction.

In his frenzy he lashed his massive tail and struck the Bog Burglar, sending her flying off to the gaping hole made in the side of the hallway.

Astrid broke off, heading towards to Camicazi's direction, attempting to assist the Bog Burglar and get her back into the fight. From here, it was maybe a two story drop to the ground, I don't know the odds of surviving that, but I imagine that it would have hurt either way.

Astrid bent down, offering a hand to save the Bog Burglar while she had the chance.

But Dad had other plans. I saw him gathering his flaming breath, with a deep inhale.

Fear welled up in my, giving me the the strength and resolve to act. I couldn't grab a weapon as my sword had skid just out of reach, but maybe I could reach something else. I struggled against him, getting my hand free, reaching towards his head in a pleading gesture. "Dad! No! Don't blast them!" I screamed. My voice had changed, sounding more growl like.

His harsh eyes turned to make, a look that reminded me of what he gave me in my greatest failures. A growl emanated in his throat like he was giving my a lecture through angered noise alone. I hoped deep down that whatever my father had become, he was still my Dad. I mean, no matter what, right?

His head bent down to me up until his eyes were directly in front of mine. That burning gaze of his felt like he was looking through my very core.

I held my breath, sweat and anxiety flooded my body. Come on Dad.
Please..

He pulled away from me locking me in his presence for a veritable eternity. "Then let it be so," he said.

I gave a sigh of relief. Okay, so, I can at least convince my father to stop attacking my friends. That was good. Maybe he was in a situation like Mom was where he had to serve the King against his will and tha-

"Instead, I shall do what I should have done from the beginning, _boy..." _My father continued drawing in air, his gaze turned directly to me.

My eyes widened. What was he doing? Was he really going to do _that?_"Dad!" I wailed and desperately struggled to get away. But I was trapped beneath his powerful wing.

"Why should I, boy?" He bend down right in front of my face, his guttural growls sending cold shivers up my spine. "You were always a disgrace!"

It was in that very moment that I realized that this dragon wasn't my father. No, the King twisted him into something else.

I burned.

42. Chapter 42

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

If there was any lingering doubt and hesitation I had over rebelling over my former ruler, mother's words shattered them and cast them to the wind. After what he did to my father and the price he has asked my mother to pay, I doubted I would ever forgive him.

"Mother! _That monster _does not deserve that title or your service!" I shouted, summoning my outrage to give me strength; I can't let my fear and hesitation control me, not when I had all of this boiling hate! I stepped forward, and looked my parent in the eye. "You should be home with brother and me, helping us free Dad!"

Yet, the other Night Fury kept her gaze level, did not look away. "Any who would be there to watch your father? Who would be there to stop our Lord from twisting him even more?"

"He's not _my Lord_!" I snapped, anger surging. I had nothing left for the _Red Death_, but contempt and hatred. "And he shouldn't be yours either!"

Mother kept her gaze secure, though the beginnings of a frown formed upon her face. She turned to the darkened skies above, looking at Stormfly and her Flight. "Toothless, sweetie, no matter what you think, I have to be there. It's the right thing for me to do."

"So is slaying more of _our Kin_ the right thing now?" I was not

talking about dragons. I shouted louder, wanting to make my point even clearer. "Mother, that monster set you against our own for years and he will ask you to do worse the longer you stay with him; how is _any of that good?_"

Mother averted her gaze, not wanting to look. "I know that this might all be hard for you to understand but I _need _to be there by our Lord's side!"

I leveled my gaze at the other Night Fury, my eyes hard. "Why?" I shouted. "What's so important about that? Is it father?"

Mother gave a heavy sigh. "Sweetie, your father is not my only concern." She turned her gaze towards one of the walls and appeared to stare at it for a moment. I turned towards the wall, but there was nothing odd about it other than the layer of ash that smothered it. Was mother looking past it? "Needless to say, the one thing I am not worried about is his safety?"

I squinted my eyes confused. Somehow, I got the feeling mother was aware of something involving Dad. "Wait, father is here?"

Mother nodded. A cold chill ran up my spine as she did. Suddenly, I remembered there was a vacancy for One Eye's old position and that my brother met the _Red Death _while he was conducting recruitment for new Knights. That realization was not pleasant in the least. I shifted my body and readied for a quick climb upwards, ready to take to the skies and find my father, but mother's paw on my side kept me from moving. "There is more I worry about than my mate alone," said the Night Fury.

"Then who else?" I asked. Well, it was mostly a rhetorical question: I already had an idea.

"You and your brother..." That came as no surprise, but at the same time, I was glad to know Mom still cared for me even if we were technically enemies.

I eased my body, stress and strain leaving me as my mood shifted. My Mom was not the target of my anger, just only related to it by a series of unfortunate happenings. "Mom, I know you worry about us, but what can aiding our enemy do to help us? I mean, unless you're actively sabotaging him somehow..."

"In a way..." Mother frown and turned her gaze to the pavement, her limbs drooped lazily.

None of that was a good sign by my book. "Mom?"

"Toothless, I also worry for our Lord..."

I blinked several times in rapid succession and my feet automatically back pedalled while I just looked at Mom with what was probably biggest and most bewildered expression I could ever make. I did not know how to make sense of them; it was like the statement itself was imaginary and unreal. Yet, as understanding dawned on me, I felt as though my heart had a knife slowly plunging into it. "Mom, what are you talking about!?" I was exasperated, confused, bewildered. Just why would my own mother care about that monster after everything that has been done to us?

The elder Night Fury did not move, but her expression changed into a deep sorrowful expression. "Toothless, our Lord, is not evil, at least, not as bad as some of our own neighbors. Has Hiccup told you about them?"

I nodded. I learned of some of the worst and most destructive Tribes in the Archipelago from Hiccup. None of them had any representation on the island, but I knew they were out there. "The 'Murderous' are pretty self explanatory and well, I know plenty about the Outcasts." The nice thing about some Viking Tribe names is that they were easy to translate, because they were all so simple and easy to grasp.

Mother's faces briefly shone a smile, either proud at me learning about them or my brother for my knowing, but the smile was short lived and disappeared as soon as I noticed it. "And what those _Herd_ do is vile and they _revel _in it!"

"And I am to believe _our King _is better than them?" I spat. "Well, I guess he does not have to work hard for it..."

"Toothless!" Mother's scolded.

I did not back down; I squinted long and hard into the other Night Fury's greenish-yellow eyes. I was through being a coward, not when a matter this important was right in front of me. "Tell me, what makes him so different?"

Mother averted her eyes and stepped back. "Sweetie, it might be hard for you to understand."

I stepped forward. "Try me what makes the _Red Death _oh so justified in his actions!"

Mother's gaze shifted slowly to that one wall again, as if it was taking her attention from her, though she still kept most of her attention upon me. "... Only from his perspective."

I smirked. That was proof enough for me. "See?"

"Sweetie, he is not evil, not in the way the worst of us are, but he is misguided."

I acted like I was going to puke. The Red Death was misguided? That was laughable. "Oh, sure, so his decision to kidnap your mate, my father, was all because he was acting like a fool?"

Mother made her own displeased face. I do not understand; why she was so resistant? What kept her clinging his side? "Yes. Which is why he has Knights, to _guide him_, to advise him."

I just stared. "And that's supposed to make me feel better?" I don't know what I hated worse. The fact that Mom was stuck playing servant to the Red Death or the fact she was deluding herself about the nature of her arrangement. She was a servant, nothing more in that tyrant's eyes.

"It is. Do you know how many times our Lord had planned on sending his forces to capture you and your brother, only to cancel them in

the last minute? In fact, do you know how long he had been sitting"

I opened my mouth to answer, but then closed it again.

Mother took that as a sign to answer freely. "Twenty."

"Twenty?" If I was in my human form, I probably would have whistled. Twenty times. No matter how you diced it, planning and then canceling an invasion twenty times was significant. I mean, for one, if there was a reason to invade and capture me and my brother, why did he put it off until now? Why not go sooner if there was a cause? I blew out some smoke from my nostril. Well, at least the jerk gave us enough time to get started on gathering a force to challenge him. "Then what took him so long?"

"The fact that up until most recently, our King could not confirm that you intended to go to war against him." The other Night Fury frowned. "Child, our Lord was perfectly fine just leaving you and our home untouched, up until you started dragging others into this mess. He choose to defend himself preemptively." She turned her gaze over at a nearby wall, different from the one that previously held her attention. It was typical of a Viking's home, full of old axes, discarded shields, a crude painting of a child; it was a place where keepsakes and momentos could be held. A part of my heart sank; I did not know these people, but at the same time, was I to blame for what happened to them tonight?

I refused to accept that. "And brother and I chose to gather allies to _save you and father!_" I spat, limbs all tightened with tension and anger. "Are we to blame for planning to take back my own father? Are we at fault for seeking to defend ourselves from a threat?"

Mother bent down her head and turned away to the wall. "No."

I stood my ground; I was not going to back down from this. "Then, why do you choose to be on his side? Why continue to serve him. Hasn't he done enough to us already?"

Mother did not answer. Instead she kept her gaze fixated on that wall of hers, her expression slowly darkening. I knew my former ruler might have given my mother some sort of unusual sensory powers, maybe the ability to see things a distance away through walls, I could not be sure, but it wouldn't surprise me if that's what she was using. The question then became, what was it that was so important to take up her attention?

"It's father, isn't it?" I guessed. I did not really know, but the feeling at the bottom at my stomach hidden just barely under my rage led me to that conclusion

Mother frowned and nodded her head. "Yes."

I turned to the wall and looked hard where mother looked; I wish I could see through the wood and past every building in the way, but sadly I was limited to just imagining what became of my father. There was no avoiding the topic or putting it aside now. Dad was here and he was changed. I turned back to Mom, unsure what to think. Was making him a leader of the Red Death's forces her doing? "We have to keep him from leaving," I said desperately. I did not want to lose my

father, not if there was a chance we could save him or...

"Toothless, don't go after him!" declared my mother. "It's too dangerous!"

I looked back at her, my eyes turning into slits.. "And then what? Wait for him to be attack us again?" I straightened my limbs out and took a leap. My wings sprang into motion, lifting my body slowly skyward. I had to go.

"Toothless!" my mother declared. And then I fell to earth, a weight crashing into my chest. Mom tackled me, pinning me under her weight.

"Mom!" I growled. Why was she betraying me?

"I'm not letting you go to face him!" she shouted. "I forbid you to go to him!"

"I'm not a child!" I struggled, using my paws to push her off. Oh, how I wish I could just wriggle out from under her.

"You are mine!" Mother held me in a domination position, using her much heavier weight and size against me. She had more strength too, no doubt from a lifetime of combat and training. I was at a disadvantage.

It was then I realized something else I had to do.

All throughout my life, I had never reallyâ€¦ fought against my other mother. Sure, I had my rebellious days and I resented her growing up, but all of that was justâ€¦ kid stuff, like the refusal to eat a certain type of meat or not wanting to eat flowers when I got sick, stuff that did not really matter. And true, most of my incentive to fight back vanished since I was I was scared of Mom. But at the heart of it all, it was not her reputation that scared me the most about her. "I love you, Momâ€¦"

At a single phrase, the elder Night Fury's heavy limbs felt less forced against my body. Her guard slowly dropped. "Toothlessâ€¦"

"I love you," I said again; I hurt on the inside saying it, like I was sliding a dagger into her back. Probably because I was going to betray my own mother.

With sudden motion and a burst of strength, I forced my mother off and knocked her to the side of the room. She blinked bewildered for a split second, not even realizing that I took advantage of her, her trust. "Toothless!" she roared as her back slammed against the wall, paintings and nickknacks fell to the floor. "What are you doing?" she groaned as she picked herself up, her back leaning against the wall.

I took advantage of the time I bought to stand up and motion my body into a stance. "Dad, needs us Mom. Maybe now more than ever; I have to go to him." I recalled Mildew's statement about my Dad getting twisted against his will. A part hat if during that time Mom was subverted as well? Maybe that's why she still served the Red Death, no matter all of the horrific things she had experienced under his

command. Hopefully after taking care of Dad, I could save Mom as well.

Mother readied her own guard up. Her eyes scanned every exit, tracking those movements. "Toothless, that is a _bad _idea! I refuse to let you meet him!" She was not going to let me go, was she?

"Bad ideas run in the family!" I charged, planning to slam into her, to subdue her or break from her long enough that I could face my father..

But mother ducked out of the way, sending me crashing into the wall. With a deft turn of her body, mother spun herself to face me and let out a plasma blast.

I pushed myself off the wall just in time to avoid getting hit, only getting caught in the shockwave of the destructive orb. The wall broke, the force of the blast causing it to turn into nothing by torn apart firewood.

After that, I lobbed another blast of own at my mother. She dodged of course, letting it discharge at the opposite wall, but I was never really aiming for her to begin with. I realized that taking her on in the up and close was not the smartest thing I could do. Instead, I needed to get into the air as fast as possible, where I had room to move and had far more practice fighting in.

Mom darted after me not long after I left the building but I had already taken flight, giving me a head start on the climb up. The other Night Fury tailed me, sending blasts of fire right at me. A part of me wished I actually took up my brother's offer to fix the cloak much sooner, because now I regret not having another Night Fury to compare my own speed to.

"Toothless!" a voice. I look upwards and found Stormfly nearby. She was being trailed by a few other dragons, the ones left behind after Mom disbanded most of them. They all blasted at her with their collective Breaths, the Nadder was forced to flee."What have you done?"

"Yeah, well, the diplomacy option did not work as we hopedâ€|" I replied. "Mom, I think the King has her under a spell or something, she would not see reason!"

She gave me a look and quickly nudged herself to the side, narrowly avoiding a gout of flame. She scowled, turning her gaze backwards for a split second. "Well, things have not been good up here either! I hope you have a plan!"

I turned back. Mother had rejoined her small entourage of Knights behind us and all we could do was flee and evade their attacks. There were enough dragons that I don't think Stormfly and I could take them on a head on fight, not to mention my Mom backing them up. Sure, I took down some dragons despite being outnumbered before, but those were commoners, Knights were way better. "Capture them alive!" shouted the Night Fury.

I gave the Nadder a nervous grin. Half my attention was on her, the other half was on the dragons right tailing us. "I'm kind of making this up as I go along." Maybe if I was not so frustrated overâ€|

everything about my own mother right now, I would have remembered the Flight above us.

"Great!" declared the Nadder, her sarcasm obvious as she was. "That makes me feel so much better."

"Well, I have an idea." I scanned ahead, my eyes turned towards _the fort _of Fort Sinister just up ahead. I had not seen my brother since the battle started and if I had to guess he probably was in the fortress with Dagur or something. I could easily go to him and ask for his help, he probably had some allies and some of our own men with him. And even if he was not, I was still an Heir, I could ask backup from Dagur or some of the other Chiefs if I just removed the cloak from my head. Which was good, if my sense of direction was correct, that meant Dad was somewhere there too and I just had the inkling feeling I would need all the help I could get.

* * *

><p>When I was growing up, I had always thought the best stories were the ones that the storyteller lived through. Now that I was older, I know that that benefit only applied to the listener. Because now, I really wished I would tell this story second hand. I was trained to be a bard, not a fighter; I was brought up into the Knighthood just because I had good enough grades and came from a brood with enough prestige to hold it all. Now that path led me to here, standing in a burning village, not in the body I was born with. This story would be so much more interesting if I was not the one living through it.<p>

"Meatlug, are you okay?" the large boy said to me, his voice a low whisper. His voice was still the same as it was a week before, but after tonight, I couldn't help but be afraid of it.

I shivered, uneasy. "Yeah, I'm fine. Really!"

The larger boy nodded, not saying much. Hopefully, he believed me. "Oh, okay, then." He turned his gaze skyward and readied his weapon. He steadily crept forward, shield raised and eyes towards the heavens. Now was not the time to talk.

I gulped, fearing the sight of myâ€| boyfriend's blade, afraid that he would turn it against me. The rational part of me just knew he wouldn't, but that did not mean I could escape the dread feeling at the pity of my stomach. I knew my Fishlegs was strong, he used that strength to defend me from an enemy once before, but _this _was different. I mean, I just saw him knockout someone I knew, not a close friend, but well, someone that I would definitely know the name of if she had one. I mean, she _was _the sister of one of my own peers. Oh, how I wished I could forget it.

"And then when he came to over there, he ran through them all. Wham! Just like that!"

"Tuffnut!" I turned around and hissed. "Quiet."

"What?" defended his sister. "He was about to get to the best part!"

"Not now!" At least while I was in ear shot. Forgetting about the

incident would be so much easier so long as they kept talking about it! It was at this spot where Fishlegs fought my Kin and scored a blow on the Nightmare. Sadly, she was not here, having flown off a short distance while in a daze. I glanced over two other right behind the twins. "Don't encourage them! Not at a time like this!"

Barf and Belch simply shrugged, giving me grins.

I groaned. I would have thought that the only two Kin I had with me would show a little sympathy, but then again, they never really paid much attention to things. And that's only gotten worse as they've gotten involved with the twin's antics.

"Shush!" Fishlegs declared, ending any further discussion. "They'll hear us if we get any louder."

Everyone around looked up at the skies. The dragons above were sparse in the space directly above us, but just up ahead their numbers swelled. There was no way in all of the world that we could fight our way through that cloud of my own Kindred. I knew the strengths and weaknesses of my own Kin, but knowledge was never enough to break through sheer numbers alone. I frowned. "I sure hope this plan of yours works."

"It'll work. Really!" Fishlegs said, his confidence so overly enthusiastic I almost thought it was salt. He turned over to the twins. "You have it ready?"

Ruffnut and Tuffnut both gave sour looks. "Aw come on! It's our last one!" said the girl.

Tuffnut groaned. "And it'll take us days to get more! Days! Importing is not easy!" He acted like it was a horrendous crime.

I sighed. I know I have only been involved with humans in a span measured in months, but come on, what Fishlegs was asking for. "Barf, Belch," I said deadpan.

The two boys seemed to enjoy the idea, while their closest friends did not. With a deft motion and some complaints from the twins, the two managed to swipe a small metal can from the hip of Tuffnut's waist. "Hey!"

Barf handed Fishlegs the container, giving the twins an awkward smile. "Sorry, but it was worth-"

Belch completed. "-seeing the looks on your faces!"

"I know it's not eel juice, but I guess this'll have to do." Fishlegs and opened the container and dipped his finger into it.

I stuck out my tongue in disgust. I might have been in a human body, but I still found stripped eels to be unhealthy. "That's because they're repulsive! I mean, it's like coating yourself in garbage to some of us! This plan on the other hand, well, it relies on a completely different method of deception."

My boyfriend did a sheepish smile. "Well, good thing you can make up stories." As Fishlegs pulled out his hand, a red, sticky substance clung to his fingers.

Tuffnut and Ruffnut both gave defeated looks. "I guess we can put up with coating ourselves in jam instead of our bread..."

Tuffnut still gave a sigh. "Yeah, but breakfast is still ruinedâ€¦"

"I'm trying to think positively!" declared Ruffnut.

Barf and Belch both silently laughed to themselves, amused and pleased.

Fishlegs drew a knife and punched several holes in his tunic, careful not to actually draw his own blood. Then with that same knife, he placed the jam over near where the cuts into his body went. Tuffnut and Ruffnut did the same, not as enthusiastic, but they tried their best to fake it.

At this time, Barf, Belch, and I removed all of our belongings from our persons and got ready to assume our true forms for the first time in a week.

It was clear to both me and Fishlegs that there was no way that we could fight our way through the horde of dragons and meet up with Snotlout, Hookfang, and the Nightmare's unnamed sister. So, the alternative approach was a cunning plan of Fishlegs's own design. After all, my Kindred would never suspect a Gronckle or a Zippleback working for humans. All it came down to was whether or not we could present a scene that would be believed.

The attack on Fort Sinister seemed have come to a stand still, with the dragons occupying and destroying what they could, while the humans fought them off. My Kin might have been numerous, but even then there were not enough dragons to cover every single area. Yet despite this, it was not expected for every single dragon to assault the human resistance. Most of my Kin were commoners, draftees who were selected to assist the Knights but were not a permanent part of my former Lord's military. For them there was no organization, no command structure beyond listening to the instructions of any Knight who was right in front of you. It was not uncommon for commoners to take part in the initial stages of the raid but then spend the rest of their time foraging for food or actively searching for targets to earn a little bit of prestige.

And it was there our plan lay. No one would bother a lowly Gronckle or Zippleback taking some time off to rest wounds and dine on some captured game. 'Herd' meat was after all considered a delicacy by some, making the excuse even more believe. All Barf, Belch, and I would need to do was to assume our true forms and pretend that our friends were nothing but bloodied corpses ready to be devoured. Not many would scrutinize that.

Still, I felt uneasy. I mean, the plan was simple and I was sure I could lie effectively, but I couldn't help but worry a little. I mean, for one, jam had a smell that was decidedly not blood.

As the human part of our group slowly finished punching holes and making fake claw marks that dripped fake blood, the rest of us undid our amulets.

Within a blink of the eye, the two blonde haired boy quickly lost independance from each other, fusing into one two headed being. The Zippleback was reborn in a single moment, both heads looking quite relieved that they were now once again complete.

I changed as well. My form took on much more weight becoming rounder. Meanwhile, a hardened carapace grew tiny little wings that sprouted on my back. The transition from large girl to Gronckle was painless, but slightly disorienting once it was all over. I stretched my body. I find that spending extended periods in one form tended to make assuming the other feel awkward for a few minutes, but it was a fact of life for me. Still, it was great to be back to being a dragon, even if it was mostly to deceive my own Kin.

I turned over to Fishlegs who looked like someone who was well on their way to looking like a convincing corpse. The only thing missing was that he was not pale enough, but I imagine most of my Kin would overlook that detail. He smiled at me and grabbed a hold of my head in a hug. "Ready, girl?"

I gave a low chuckle and licked him in response. I never get to do that as a human since it was improper behavior. But as a dragon I had the excuse to relish the opportunity.

"Hey! Careful, we're outta jam!" said the boy.

"You can say that again!" complained Tuffnut. "Hey- Wait!"

For his comment Ruffnut threw him onto of the Zippleback's claws. "Come on, the sooner we get this over with the sooner we can eat it!" The two headed dragon's talons clutched around the boy and then his sister, careful not to grip too hard.

The Zippleback seemed amused by all this, though the Tuffnut still seemed opposed to the idea. "Fine. Whatever."

Fishlegs rolled his eyes at them and turned to me again. "Alright, Meatlug, it's all up to you."

I nodded my head and the boy then climbed onto my back, crosswise. The boy was bigger than a sheep, not as easily held in my jaws and my paws were not as firm as some other dragons, so the obvious choice for me was to have him upon my back. Fishleg then pretended to fall limp, like he was a large slab of meat that had been thrown on top of me.

Tuffnut and Ruffnut did the same. As the Zippleback took flight, careful not to squash their charges, the twins fell still, dangling their limbs like they were dead rabbits.

I flew right beside the Zippleback, my tiny wings buzzing. We flew over the over the buildings, yet made sure that we were not too far off the ground; Fishlegs was not holding onto me after all and a sudden burst of panic would be all it took to send him falling.

"Where to?" asked one of the Zippleback's heads; Belch.

Barf responded first moving his head in a direction, pointing at a building further down the road. "Right there!"

I blinked. One of the neat things about naming them was that it was so much easier to keep track of who was who, but this wasâ€¦ different. I don't think I ever really noticed them not totally in sync before. "You sure?" It was a valid question. There were a lot of buildings damaged and burned from the attacks, with plenty more suffering the same fate. How could we be sure that's the right place?

Barf shrugged. "It's the one that suffered the most damage that was not fire on this stretch. A Nightmare crashing into the building would do that."

Belch tilted his head a bit and looked closely. "Maybeâ€¦" Yeah he is definitely out of sync.

I nodded my head and we flew forward. It was a good argument and we lacked any other option. Hopefully, we could make it past the flock of dragons that occupied the airspace between here to there.

As we slowly flew towards the building, we randomly blasted a few buildings with our Breath, just to keep up appearances even more. The dragons that flew above and around us did not seem to pay us any special attention as we went through them. Our Kin were none the wiser.

"It working?" Fishlegs whispered his voice trembling.

"Of course!" I responded as quiet as I could. Then I realized he could no longer understand me. It was sad, but true. And it was not like he could look at me without breaking our coverâ€¦ so I could not reassure him.

The twins were also losing their patience, their heads randomly rose and fell to look at each other, the two of them giving groans of boredom. The Zippleback head did their best to remind them with whispers, the two responding back with complaints. Man, how did they hold a conversation despite the twins never being dragons before?

"Where do you think you're going?" A voice declared from off to the side.

My body stiffened, fear running up my spine. We got found out! I just knew itâ€¦ or maybe. I bit down my fear for a moment, stopping myself from jolting ahead. Besides, I was far too slow. I turned to meet the newcomer. "Uh, what do you mean?" I said, half pretending not to know what was intended.

The dragon that asked that question was a Nadder, with a similar coloration to that of Stormfly but considerably paler. "Just wondering where youths were going with those Herd carcasses. I mean, you are hauling them somewhere."

"Well, eating of course!" I lied, giving an awkward grin. "I've always wanted to try Herd!" Well, I'll admit I _did_, _but_ that was when I was young and foolish.

Unfortunately the newcomer seemed quite interested. "Oh, really? Uh, mind if I have a bite?"

"No!" I vehemently refused.

"Come on, one bite?" begged the Nadder.

"No, he's mine!" I take it back; I am downright _thankful_ that Fishlegs was not hearing any of this. I felt like breaking down and letting out a squeal.

"Fine." The Nadder pouted and slowly backed away from me, only to then fly by side by side the Zippleback. "How about you? You boys willing to share?"

Both of the heads seemed to be knocked clueless for a second. "Uh, well, you seeâ€|"

"We are um..."

I glanced at my two headed Kin, warning them without a word. They better not screw this up.

Unfortunately for me, someone else did it for them instead. "Guys, come on make something up!" Apparently Tuffnut, was able to figure out the context of that conversation, despite not understanding a word of itâ€| Which immediately led to breaking his own cover as a dead slab of me.

"It lives!" declared the Nadder in surprise.

"Great going, genius!" declared Ruffnut also dropping any pretense of pretending. She raised a fist up in anger wanting to punch her brother but she was too far away.

"They both live!" the Nadder barked out. He probably did not understand what the two were talking about, but he responded by drawing in his Breath in an attempt to neutralize the target.

"Hurry do something!" I snapped.

"Like what?" declared the Belch.

"I know!" replied Barf. Then the large dragon quickly slammed to the two Vikings. With a heavy thump and a sudden impact, both of the blondes went limp, groaning.

"Nice!" I said.

Fishlegs whispered in my ear, letting me know he was still there and not breaking his cover. "I don't know what happened, but I think they deserved it..."

"They did," I purred back. Unfortunately he couldn't understand my speech, but well, maybe he could read emotions.

The Nadder swallowed back his Breath, now that the danger was gone. His eyes showed us confusion. "Uh, what was that about?"

I gave my Kindred a sheepish smile. "Yeah, well, we heard that Herd tasted better when eaten alive!" I said, trying to make the most believable lie I could.

The Nadder seemed to buy it, bobbing his head up and down in acceptance. "Hm, maybe I should try thatâ€¦ So, you're really not gonna share?"

"Nope!" said Belch.

"Gotta eat 'em whole!" added Barf. Finally the two of them seemed back in sync with the other.

The twins despite being knocked out, still seemed to possess just enough consciousness to respond to that. Mostly, it was just them swearing to pay the two headed dragon back for this. The Zippleback seemed oddly amused by their statements.

The Nadder sighed. "Fine, I guess I'll just have to find my ownâ€¦ and just so we're clear, we're not going to tell our King about any of this, right?"

I frowned. "Oh?" What did the King have to do with this? Whatever '_this' _wasâ€¦

"Oh, didn't you hear?" the Nadder frowned. "Our Lord has recently banned the practice of eating Herd! Now it's punishable by banishment!"

Now that was interesting. Why would our Lord declare a new law over that of all things? I mean, I wholeheartedly support the decision, but from my studies of our own history, eating Herd, humans, was an old tradition that many of my Kin see as sacred. There was going to be plenty of resistance to abolishing that practice. Why would our King add this new law? And what did he hope to gain from it?

"Oh, yeah, I can see how it'd be bad to let anyone else know." I gave the other dragon a grin. With any luck we can use this to our advantage. Hopefully no one in charge of maintaining or supportive of that new change was nearby. "Well, don't tell on us to any Knights and we won't say you conspired with us!"

"Promise!" declared the Nadder. He then motioned his body to the side and flew off. There, one crisis averted.

Thankfully, it also seemed like the only crisis we needed to deal with. The building that Barf directed us to, the one where we believe our Peer's sister crashed into, was within Breathing distance. Now came the hard part, looking for our friends.

43. Chapter 43

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****I know this is late, but these tense moments are quite hard to work with. I also ended up getting distracted, but regardless, I hope to continue getting back on track.****

I screamed in pain and agony, the flames and heat seeping through my newly forming scales. With the spell holding back my transformation failing, every hurt and injury, especially heat, drove me ever

further away from being the boy I was. With the torrent of flame bathing me, there was no chance I would come out of this unchanged. The changing itself was painless, it was just that it did not protect me from _suffering_ injury.

Yet even though I had changed, I still hurt. Dragons were supposed to be near unphased from fire. My scales should have insulated me, shielding me from the worst of it was supposed to be near impossible, yet here I was, suffering, hurting, and burning. I guess even dragons are not so fireproof on the _outside_ after all.

I lifted my handâ€¦ paw up to cover myself from the burning, choking cloud. If I had been wholly human or lacked the ability to quickly recover from the heat, I would have probably died. Nothing would have been left of me, nothing but a charred corpse and smoking remains. Even as a dragon, I felt like I was going to suffer a slow, agonizing demise.

Yet that was not the worst of it. Yes, there was something far more painful, far more gut wrenching than the idea that I was being burned and smothered to death!

It was the very idea that my own father was capable of doing it to me. No, he was something else, my father yet not.

"DAAAAD!" I howled and cried, desperate to reach him. He did not stop, in fact, he increased the volume and intensity of his blaze in an attempt to smother me.

My own father was trying to kill me and that hurt me far more than his intense Breath ever did. Only in my darkest moments did I ever consider that he would ever hurt me. It was like a wretched horrible nightmare from my worst of moments made manifest. Sadly, I know I am not dreamingâ€¦

I struggled and shouted some more, all to deaf ears. My relative size and strength were much greater now when compared to the burning Nightmare that my father had become, but he was still far stronger than me, he always was. My vision was clouded, my eyes were shut, trying to keep the stinging heat from poking out my eyes. I was so desperate to get out, so desperate to do something anything to escape my fate.

My fatherâ€¦ was my father, but right now, I was not sure. What drove him to this? What madness consumed him?

In one final act of desperation, I did something that if I was not so fearful, I would never do. I bit on the Nightmare's wing with a hard clamp, the burning and intense heat that radiated from him entered my throat, singing my insides.

My Dad might have almost been the next best thing to being made of iron, but a dragon's wings were still vulnerable. My father backed away, recoiling in a sudden surprised jerk. He screeched and shouted into the very ceiling, sending his intense dragon's breath into to ceiling.

With frightened panic and the overwhelming desire to escape filling my limbs, I kicked off my surprised captor and made my escape. I shambled out from out of my father's space and went on the defensive,

my body still aching and hurting. I felt like I was a burnt coal well on its to being ashâ€¦ or maybe like I was surrounded by burning coals. I cringed and groaned.

"Hiccup!" I heard Astrid shout. I turned to look at them. She and Camicazi were making their way back to the fight now that they had been given enough time to gather themselves. Sadly, Thuggory was still out for the count.

"Stand back!" I responded weakly, my throat still burning.

My father meanwhile recovered my initial shock tactic and stood firm. My attack caught him off guard and only managed to leave a few bite marks into the leathery membranes of his wings, little droplets of blood dripping. It was enough for him to consider the injury. He snarled, "You dare strike your own father? How disgraceful!"

"I don't want to fight you!" I shouted. It was hard to believe my father was saying these things to me, yet that nagging feeling in the back of my head wouldn't let me just dismiss it as a sign of his "corruption" by the King. After all, what if he was just finally speaking his own mind.

The dragon sneered, sounding almost insulted. "You have no choice! No son of mine will be a coward a coward!" He charged, his heavy feet driving him forward.

I leapt out of the way, letting the Nightmare pass me. He turned his body back, facing me when he realized I had cleared him. "Stop this, Dad!" I shouted, mustering what little strength I had.

"I will not!" He blasted a gout of fire at me again. I ducked behind some of the debris and let it absorb the intense heat. While I am not certain of just everything the King did to my father's mind, I can certainly see what had happened to his body. He was to a Nightmare what a Nightmare was to a _Terror. _He practically radiated heat hot enough to burn a dragon's hide and his Breath was a really killer. A long time ago, Toothless told me about Gifts. My father must have got one to commemorate hisâ€¦ completion.

"He's not letting you back off, Hiccup!" Astrid shouted, leaping into the Fray. She swung her sword at my father, managing to land a painful gash onto the dragon's wings. "You better fight back!"

"Stop!" I shouted at her. My father wailed and screamed, in pain.

"Your father would never say those things!" she countered.

I shook my head. "He's _still _my Dad! I can't hurt him!" I tackled Astrid right out of the way of a burning tail sweep, just barely managing to clear it myself. While Astrid probably would have survived the blow, I was not going to stand for anything hurting her.

"Well, that feeling sure isn't mutual!"

The Nightmare charged again, his motions quick and ferocious. "Standing behind a female! I thought I told you betterâ€¦ but you

were always bad at learning!" He seized the initiative, throwing wild attack after wild attack in an attempt to throw me and Astrid off balance, unable to mount a counteroffensive.

"I. Heard. That!" Astrid shouted between breaths.

The Nightmare didn't seem to react to Astrid and instead diverted his attention right at me, despite how passive I slammed his body into me, sending me flying backwards and rolling from the momentum.

I crashed into the nearby wall, my body collapsing. I rolled onto my back, my gaze directed at the ceiling. My head spun a dozen different directions. I might have been a dragon right now, making me loads bigger and heavier, but my father could still throw me around like a rag doll without even trying. I was practically defeated at this point. I had little to no will to fight him on my own all because I wanted to get him to snap out of whatever enchantment the King put under him.

Astrid retaliated with several lunges of her own, but a quick motion of the Nightmare's massive wings buffeted the sword out of her hands. The blade was hurled against the wall, breaking to pieces upon impact. "Stupid, cheap sword!" she cursed, clearly missing her axe. But without her weapon, she was vulnerable.

My father made no comment on Astrid's words, as if what she had said had no bearing or importance with him. He glared at me. "Then, if you will not fight for yourself." My father saw an opportunity and he took it. He pushed Astrid into the wall as well, knocking my girlfriend flat on her rear. But he wasn't done with her just yet. The Nightmare took in a breath and then began readying another fiery blast.

"Astrid!" I shouted and promptly stood on my feet. Surprise and energy suddenly replaced hopelessness and weariness.

My father then got ready to exhale the blast, but then suddenly, his mouth was kept shut as a rope ensnared itself around the Nightmare's jaws. His burning breath was trapped inside his mouth, letting out little sparks and spurts of flame as it tried to escape. He had failed to burn Astrid.

At the other end of the lasso was a certain Bog Burglar with a wicked smile on her face. "I keep telling you to have more holdout weapons!" Camicazi finally reappeared after a long absence, apparently having gone to fetch some extra gear, in particular a spear. She slid the spear on the ground

"Noted!" Astrid snapped. She took the spear and then slid out from the position my father placed her in. She then turned her gaze to me. "Hiccup, we could use a hand here!"

I stood, finally realizing that I really had no choice in this matter. My Dad was crazy and not in the way he should be. I had to put a stop to him so I could figure out a way to undo this mess.

While the rope that kept my father's mouth shut managed to keep his breath at bay for a moment, the rope was still made of flammable materials. It caught on fire and slowly burned until it became weak

enough for my father's jaws to snap it open. "Such insolence!" he snarled.

Camicazi laughed, as if she was unafraid.. "Roar! Roar! Roar!"

"Camicazi!" I shouted. "Don't tempt my father."

"Hey, I don't speak dragon! And as much as I would like dragons to speak Norse, that ain't happening." Camicazi replied, apparently correctly guessing my own cries. I had forgotten the biggest downside to being a dragon. "But I can still get under anyone's skin, whether they be human nor dragon!"

My father didn't seem it fit to respond to her or even care about her existence; he kept his snarling directed at me.

This time, it was my turn to start the offensive. I lobbed a blast my father's feet, causing him to jerk back in reflex.

Taking the opening, Astrid stepped forward, pointing her spear in my father's general direction. Dad meanwhile tried to gnash at her with his jaws, but the spear was in the way and threatening to cause damage if he didn't jerk backwards to avoid getting hit. He then opted to finish off with something he had failed to do earlier and just burn Astrid.

With her reach, Astrid was able to sidestep the fire and move elsewhere.

Camicazi ducked under the flames, almost getting hit in the crossfire. She daringly marched forward, planning to attack with her usual sword. "You know, Mama always told me that you were quite overweight for Viking but I never knew by just how much until today!" My father tried to snap at her with his jaws, but the Bog Burglar narrowly avoided getting snapped in two. "And she wasn't kidding about your bad breath! It can kill a woman and that's way harder to do thanâ€¦" Then she kept spouting all sorts of annoying nonsense, peppered with some ratherâ€¦ colorful expressions.

Father did not choose to respond to her, but that might have just been a fact that he was a little preoccupied with something else: me.

I smashed into my father's side and bit into his flanks. The intense blaze that surrounded my father burned into my throat, causing me to let go after grazing him. The Nightmare spun, but I ducked underneath his swinging tail. My chest burned inside and out, the strain of frightened action and blazing heat were taking their toll.

Astrid followed up outflanking my father and threatening to stab him with her spear with shouts and yells. From behind Camicazi spouted more insults and trash talk. Yet despite all of their noise and threats of attack, my father didn't seem to consider them beyond what it took to avoid them. It was strange, but I got the feeling that he was not even listening to a thing they said.

Then, as if to further overstate just what he thought about the two girls, he blasted the floor and ceiling with even more fire, creating a divide that separated usâ€¦ from them. "There, now for some

privacy."

I gulp, not liking my odds facing my father alone.

"Hiccup!" Astrid shouted, backing away from the intense wall of fire.

With a sudden movement, she tried to make a jump for it to the other side, but Camicazi kept her from following through. The Bog Burglar shook her head. "No. We can't!"

"I'm not letting him go!" Astrid threw a half hearted punch at the Bog Burglar and tried to throw he off. But Camicazi had a better hold and pinned her to the ground.

The Nightmare looked at them with a hard gaze but soon promptly set them aside, as if sure that the wall of flame would last long enough for him to do whatever he wanted to do to me.

I was not going to let that happen.

I turned one last look to the girls. "Astrid, take care of our friend." I looked over to Thuggory. He was still unconscious, but other than that unharmed.

"Hiccup!" Astrid cried out, still struggling to get free from the Bog Burglar. She might have been stronger than a normal person, but strength apparently did not help if you were not able to apply it.

My father sneered, as if disapproving of my actions. But that was fine with me, I was used to that. "Quit wasting your time, lad. Stand and fight me."

I smiled a manic little grin. I had other things in mind. "How about no?" See, my father might have cut the hallway in half by creating a wall of flame that was probably going to last for a while, but that didn't cover any of the _exits. _ I turned and ran down the hall.

The Nightmare uttered a howl of rage and frustration. If he disapproved of any of my actions, this had to be the big one. He ran after me, pushing his massive body to keep up with me. "You _dare_ run away from me!"

Nightmares are not built to be particularly agile where as a Night Fury on the other hand was considered among the best speedsters among dragonkind. I had a very clear speed advantage over my father, letting me stay as far as away from him as my legs would take me. On the otherhand, my father's immense size translated to a correspondingly large distance for each for step, just enough for him to come after me. I really hoped that it was not enough to _catch up to me_.

"Hiccup!" I heard Astrid shout one last time, but I had no time to reply to her. Thankfully, my Dad took to the bait. I mean, he in particular didn't seem to care at all the others, but I was really hoping that was not an act.

"I should have expected this much! You were always a coward, always a

weakling!" My father shouted, drowning out Astrid's words. He blasted a gout of flame in my direction, narrowly hitting me if it were not for a panicked leap.

But while I had no time to talk back to Astrid, I had plenty to share with my father. I gave him one last glance, narrowing my eyes. The King may have twisted him, but I was still going to speak my mind. "You're right, Dad. I am a weakling," I said in an even tone.

The Nightmare stopped attacking me for a moment, as if struck by my words, confused with my agreement. "What?"

But that was just going to be the first blow. "Everyone else in the family is a warrior; Toothless, Mom, they're both more adept at this whole fighting thing than I am. They've certainly trained for it more than I ever did."

In a sudden burst of speed, my father snapped at me, as if set off by my statement. I evaded leaping to the side and accelerating even further, putting more strain on my legs.

I spoke the truth, the plain and simple truth. "All my life, I was a hinderance, the shame of the family, the child you wished turned out different."

He lunged again, but this time I was ready. I spun around and lobbed a plasma blast at the ground. The sudden shock sent him recoiling and struggling to right himself, buying my precious time to expand the distance between him and us. I needed more time.

My father shambled after me, his speed cut as he struggled to recover. He was still pursuing me, but the distance between us had increased. He snarled. "You should have been different!" He blasted more fire in places, constantly sending streams in my direction. I might have been able to outrun my Dad, but fire went so much faster than the dragon that breathed it out. If my father had a shot limit, the King had seemingly removed it with all the fire he was breathing out.

I evaded the worst of it, but the act of dodging was taxing, taking up both time and energy. I slowed down.

"The child of the two greatest warriors of our time: a mere weakling!"

Flames wrapped around my back side, managing to singe me through my blackened scale. I doubled my pace as pain surged, running with my tail between my legs. Oh, now I get why dogs did it!

"The others always spoke about your frailties, your short comings, all to me, all the time. It was beyond shameful, more than disheartening. And through it all, you made everything worse. Always destroying the homes, setting fire to things you weren't supposed to! What was I supposed to do about that?"

"All to meet the goals you set before me!" I spat fire. No, really, I spat fire back at him to get him to stop. "I tried to be different, tried to be more. And every time I did, I made everything worse. All of the things I created, all of the spells I wrought, it was all to stand."

My father pushed through a plasma blast, deflecting it with his wing. In between my reply and his, I hadn't realized that he managed to somehow shorten the distance between us up until the point I found himself hit my his body slam and was nearly sent tumbling away. "But that didn't work, did it!? All of your attempts have failed, proving your worthlessness, your unworthiness."

I kept sprinting despite the pain on my lower body. Dad was not pulling punches; I shouldn't either. I turned my gaze back to my father again, readying what I wanted to say next. "You're wrong."

My father chortled a laugh. "And what gives you that idea?"

"You told me yourself about how proud you were." I cut my speed just low enough that my father could get a good look of my eyes. I was not afraid to face him, not afraid to get this close. No, I knew he wouldn't, not when I got his attention.

The Nightmare did not attack, his eyes wide as if somehow disbelieving yet not simply just shrugging it off. Even a being as powerful as a Red Death apparently had his limits it seemed. Now, I knew what to pick at to get to him.

"Don't you remember?" I said. "I know that when I tried first dabbling in sorcery, it blew up in my face and turned me into a freak. But don't say that in the end that it didn't turn out well for us all?"

"Like what?" my father breathed, almost in a trance.

"How about managing to stop your worst enemy from ransacking our home? How about managing to finally get some martial prowess, enough that I was able to pull a win in a challenge? How about finding mother and brother and bringing them home!?" I spouted. "I made a mistake, sure, but I've learned and taken advantage of it! People sometimes think of me as a hero and you said it yourself, you've never been more proud of me before. And I've never been more proud to be your son. "

My father slowed down, his eyes looking at me in the distance as I ran away from him.

I stopped and turned my gaze over to him. For a moment, I thought maybe I had broken the King's spell and returned my father to his senses. I approached. "Dad."

The Nightmare shook his head and his eyes narrowed. "Boy" he breathed.

I turned and ran again.

So much for hoping I beat the Red Death's spell. My words were not enough, but I knew what was. Now, how much further before I hit the dungeons.

Dad let out a thunderous roar, one that rattled my very bones. One thing was for sure, I knew that couldn't be good.

I kept running, but I was not a coward.

* * *

><p>"Oh, sisterâ€| "<p>

I hovered my head over the frailâ€| girl that rested beneath my wings. She was completely out of it, having lost consciousness after being in a stupor for an hour. I really hope that I didn't hurt her too badly when we fought. She was always so stubborn and aggressive, but she also had very poor judgement. Oh, sister dear, do not follow after mother, father, or grandfather too soon...

â€| And please don't wake up too soon either. I'll never hear the end of it once she finds out the things we did to her. Thing is, I don't know what'd be the worse rude awakening, the fact that she was no longer a Nightmare or the idea that I kept her safe under my wingâ€| maybe I should worry a little less, right?

But I couldn't. Snotlout poked his head out of the window, watching the skies above for any who came searching for us. Normally, my Kin wouldn't bother creating a small search party to find and unaccounted dragons, on the logic that such casualties were expected. However, I was very sure my sister was at least a Squire, if she managed to make the right appeals to our Lord; I know she's been trying to do that ever since she could fly. She was too important to simply discard. "They're all over the place, but no one's spotted us just yet," said my liege.

I sighed in relief. If no one found us, then Snotlout and I were safe from an onslaught of my Kin. They'd attack both of us, my liege for being human and me for being a known traitor. While I the rest of my former Peers might have easily been forgotten by the commoners and maybe some of the Knights, I had the unfortunate upbringing of being my grandfather's preferred successor. "Let us hope it stays that way," I said in my native tongue. He understood me, of course.

Snotlout bent over and touched my nameless sister's forehead, brushing away a lock of her hair. "How's she doing?"

"Fine. No bleeding, but I think she think she may have hurt herself when she fell."

Snotlout cringed and uttered what might have been a curse in his own native tongue. "She is so going to kill usâ€|."

"Bet she'll go after you first." I cracked a nervous grin. It was all I could do. I was not really much of any help to any one here, at best I was comedic relief and I was bad at that too.

My liege glowered at me and made a half hearted laugh, unassumed. Yeah, I knew that would happen. He then fell onto his rear. He unsheathed his sword and inspected it closely, making sure it was ready in case someone else came by. "We should be out there, not in some burned out hut!" he complained. "We could make an escape, find someone to, I don't know doctor her or something!"

"It's safe in here," I replied. Coming here was all my idea after all. I mean, this house we picked wasn't _that _damaged, I mean the roof was still standing. Well, we did have to break the doorâ€|. "My

Kin will not attack the same place twice, not when there are other targets that need to be sieged." I turned over to my sister, she lay still, out cold. "It's dangerous out there."

Snotlout sighed and slapped himself in the face. He shook his head and his eyes narrowed as if a certain resolve flooded in them. "Come on! Just a little danger! We're not cowards, are we?"

"No!" I grumbled, lowering my head. I mean, I _knew _I was a coward! but I couldn't _admit _that in front of Snotlout. I mean, he was my Liege! and my only real friend.

"Then what are we waiting for?" he gave me a slap on the back. "All you gotta do is! uh! carry us both out, uh! pretend we're your snacks or something and you want to have a nibble somewhere."

I stuck out my tongue, disgusted. The idea of eating a human, even if in pretend was not something that appealed to me. "But what if someone recognizes me?"

"Then bluff your way out of that!" he declared. "Like, uh, say that you're taking us for an offering with a Flight Commander."

"And if a Flight Commander spots me?"

Snotlout frowned and gave me a thoughtful look. He shook his head eventually. "Well, there's like! one of those around, right? And he's a Terror!"

"Two," I corrected. And that was assuming there were no new appointments since we left. "The other is your aunt."

Snotlout frowned., the wind briefly taken out of his wings. "Well, uh, just make stuff up as you go along!" But he recovered quickly by dodging the question. "So, all we'd need is the jam..."

I squinted. "You mean like that fruity stuff the twins have?" Why would we want that?

"To fake the blood and guts!" declared the boy. "All I gotta do is scratch my tunic up with a knife and put jam in the cuts!"

I rolled my eyes. Really, that was his plan? Liege or not, I really think Snotlout has the worst plans ever. I mean, who would be fooled by that? I laid my head onto the ground. "I'd rather just stay!"

"Hey!" My liege then tried to push me off on my resting spot, but as strong as he was for his age, he was way below my weight class. Sure, he might have been able to push me around if we were both in the same shapes, but that wasn't right now.

I did not budge, to my Liege's frustration.

"Move, will ya?" he declared.

"Make me!" I stuck my tongue out, probably goofy looking on a Nightmare's head, since it was a purely human gesture. I like Snotlout. I really do. I'm grateful for him taking me under his leadership and providing me with a home these past few months. But

this was just something I had to refuse him on. I chose to stand my ground here and now because I thought his judgement was wrong...and not just because I was too lazy.

My Liege tried to push me off my spot for a few good minutes but all of his might was not enough. "Oh, you're so lucky I can't just turn into a dragon right now!" he breathed. "Just move!"

"Alright!" and so I didâ€¦ by twitching my tail just a bit. That sent my Liege sprawling onto the floor, his body underneath mine.

"Har! Har!" he choked out a fake laugh. "Now get-"

And then, we heard a loud thumping noise coming from the rooftops. Snotlout and I stiffened, our gazes turned directly to the creaking sound from above. Something, most likely a dragon landed atop us. It was only then I just realized that me and my Liege probably ended up creating far too much noise and someone, hopefully a lowly peasant was sent to investigate.

I released Snotlout from my hold and repositioned my hold on my sister, trying to be more secure, yet more gentle. I wanted to hold her tight and safe, yet at same time I did not want to crush her beneath my wings.

My Liege picked up his weapon and rose, his back hunched over in a combat stance, his gaze fixated on the roof above. With sword in hand, Snotlout could easily best a common dragon or two. He had a reasonable chance of being a challenge to a lesser Knight, but an expert warrior would be his end. I really hoped it was not any of them.

"Be careful," I uttered.

Snotlout's shoulder's tensed up and he nodded in an almost solemn vow. He stepped closer to the window and crept his head out of the frame. I gulped, silently dreading the possibility that as he did, when he pulled back he would be without his skull. His head tilted skyward, still trying to look at the dragon that was on top of our roof.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Not sure. Too dark, can't see a thing," Snotlout declared. "There'sâ€¦ something above, definitely a dragon, but I can't tell what kind."

"How many?"

"Oneâ€¦" and then a second thud hit the roof. "Make that two," he whispered in a low tone.

"That should be fine." Two was good odds for me and my Liege. We weren't outnumbered and that tended to matter plenty in a big fight. "What're they doing?"

"They look like they'reâ€¦" Snotlout jolted his head out the window and then turned to face the busted door. "They're coming!" he snapped and quickly rose to guard himself. "Come on we'll fig- Hey!"

I was not having any of my Liege's antics right now. I bit on his tunic with my jaws and dragged him away, taking my unconscious sister along with us. I hid us behind an overturned dining table, hoping that the dragons would not find us if they only took a cursory glance. Combined with the fact that the room was dark, there being very little candles and lamps around the small hovel, our chances of slipping away undetected were good. Oh, how I really wish I was not the largest dragon I knew.

After a little bit more protect, my Liege finally broke down and then gave up struggling. He went along with my quick plan, hiding behind the table to avoid detection.

The door fell inwards and onto the floor with a satisfying thud, it having been torn off its hinges by a Monstrous Nightmare in desperate need of a good hiding spot. The two Kin stepped inside. At this distance, it was clear what they were: a Zippleback and a Gronckle, but it was still too dark to learn anything beyond that.

I stilled my throat and silence the growl and as long as Snotlout was here, it was not a nearly panicked whimper. I kept my sister close and hidden.

The figures approached, creeping ever so slow.

But I then lost my hold on Snotlout and he leapt into the air, letting out a mad battle cry with his weapon raised. He was ready to fight and there was nothing I could do to stop him now. I just hoped they wouldn't notice me.

The dragons panicked and backed away but then they stopped, their tails swishing and wagging. "It's you!" cried the Gronckle, a female, one that I knew.

"Yes!"

"It is!" Both heads of the Zippleback cried out. I knew those voices too.

I poked my head out from its hiding spot and got a closer look at the new coming Kin. I blinked, my vision clearing. "Meatlug? Barf? Belch?"

They showed their teeth. "Yes! Yes!" said Belch.

"They're here!" declared Barf, yelling outside.

Snotlout, upon the realization of who our Kin were, put his sword away, instead drawing an uncomfortable smile.

My back stiffened in fright, fearing that the shout would attract any unwanted attention. Did they betray us or were they just gluttons for punishment! "Are you crazy! The rest of our Kindred would hear you!"

"Relax! There's hardly any left out there!" said Barf.

"Yeah! I seen a whole lot of them go move on for some reason." Belch frowned as if oddly disappointed.

The Gronckle yipped, not sharing his disappointment. "It is strange. We were trying to search for you for a while, fearing that our kin would spot usâ€| but something's called their attention."

"Soâ€| then who are you calling?" Snotlout requested.

"Who else?" The Gronckle's tail wagged as the owner of the voice stepped through the door's threshold. Fishlegs stepped into view, holding a dimly lit torch.

Meatlug approached the male and liked his feet in an affectionate gesture. The boy laughed. Behind Fishlegs came the twins, running up to their companion dragons in a fit of laughter. For some reason, they were covered in jam and had their clothes were torn in places. Iâ€|. really hope Snotlout doesn't notice that or else I'd never hear the end of that from them. He stared at them all.

I let my guard down, seeing no danger and to show my friends and companions the girl hidden beneath my wings.

Fishlegs, oddly enough, was the first to take notice. "Hey who is-Woah?"

And then Snotlout pulled the large male over to my sister in a rather forceful gesture. "Just get over here!" he demanded. "You know that whole doctoring thing right?"

"I'm not very good at it!" Fishlegs fought back, but the twins decided to pitch in and dragged the large boy over. The twins laughed as helped, but had no idea what they were helping for. Fishlegs called them traitors.

I got up and left, giving them all room to work on my sister. My Kin and humans might have had different ideals of how a healer should work, but one thing that remain consistent was the need to have space to work their wonders.

Meatlug and the two headed Zippleback approached me. I turned to them. "Hey-"

"-is that-"

I nodded, not even letting the two headed dragon finish. "It's her, alright." My former peers all met my sister before. Everyone did. Unfortunately.

"Well, she's in good company now," commented Meatlug, her grin a little nervous. "And there's no danger out there with our Kin having departed."

I nodded. Without our Kin in the skies above, that meant that even in this burned out shelter we were safe. The chances we would be discovered would be slim to none. We could stay here for the rest of the conflict, never needing to leave.

But before I could finish that thought, Barf and Belch decided to interrupt me. "You do realize that when she wakes up," Barf started.

"And sees what you did to herâ€|" Belch continued.

"She'll probably kill you." Both finished as a duo."

I rolled my eyes. "Big time."

Meatlug glowered, apparently not liking that. "Look, I know you and your sister haven't all got along, but come on! You know she won't _actually _kill you."

"No, but she'll make me wish she didâ€|"

44. Chapter 44

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

Never in my whole life had I flown like this.

My powerful wings were carried by the warm updrafts and chaotic winds of a protracted siege. My limbs were charged with very primal energies and feelings that kept daring me to go further, to push my body to its breaking points. A Night Fury's body was built for speed, built for this, and I wanted to see how far I can go.

My life was on the line and I _enjoyed it._

More shots came my way and I avoided them by veering off to the side. I didn't risk returning fire at them; I had too much to lose.

Behind me mother and her Knights all swarmed, all of them slower dragons, weaker Kin than I. Lousy shots, too. Stormfly covered my left flank, not as fast as I, but managing to keep up despite being a slower breed.

It's so strange, a younger me, would have ran away from mother for vastly different reasons, with fear and terror overwhelming his heart. I had my mother's anger directed solely at me and I felt _good _about it. Maybe it had to do with that I was not exactly opposing her. I wanted to get my mother back and I was not going to let anything stand in my way, not even her.

Another volley came our way, just barely out of reach of us, but that turned out to be a diverting tactic. From below, a surprise flock of my Kindred arose in front of us and caught us by surprise. They fired their own volley of spikes and Breath and blasted my side.

I pushed through them and scattered an incendiary blast my self, flushing them out of my way.

"Toothless!" shouted Stormfly, darting through the flock that caught us off guard.

"I am fine!" I tried to grit my teeth together, but I forgot my jaw was retractedâ€| and made entirely of jagged teeth. Blasted commoners. Dull pain was felt on my side, the rush and thrill keeping the injury suppressed. It must have been a spike or a cut near my gut. I might have been fast enough to outrun the rest of them, but more attacks like that were not good for either us; they'd whittle us down through injuries and attrition, a pitiful and undignified way to

be defeated. We needed to get out of here.

Below us, I found what might have been our only hope, something not too far away at all from the Fortress. I turned towards Stormfly again.

She beamed at me and looked at me like I was my brother. "You cannot be serious?"

"Do we have a choice?"

"Yes?" she responded.

But I ignored that and decided to enact my plan. "Well, I am making it!" I then curved my wings inward and directed my body towards the ground.

She shook her head. "Hey!" And that was all I heard before she came barreling after me.

The dive was intense and steep. It has been ages since I ever did such a stunt under my own power, all of my flying in the past few months was all the result of someone else's power, someone else's wings. Now here I was using a gift I had forgotten about. The danger of what was in front of me made it worse.

And that was then I felt something grab onto my tail and tried to yank me away from my destination.

I turned back and found my mother, holding me against my will. "Turn back you foolish boy! Turn back!" she screamed. As the fastest flier on her side, it was simply reasonable she was able to catch up to me once she got her bearings straight.

But I was not going to let her deter me, now when the rewards for this dangerous stunt were so great. "No! Not until you come home!" I kicked her off and redoubled my swoop to gain more speed and momentum.

Mother attempted to grab hold of me again, but at the last second broke off and went out of sight.

"She's flying back!" Stormfly said. "She's rejoining the rest of the Flight!"

I narrowed my eyes at the ground, only barely paying attention to Stormfly's words. See, mother had good reason to fly away as the danger that I was planning around was starting to finally take notice.

"Night Fury!" shouted a Viking on the ground, big and meaty warriors like my father all readied their bows and axes and readied for an attack. Given that Stormfly and I were dragons rapidly approaching a battalion of such warriors right on the Fortress's doorstep, it was only reasonable to think about what their next target was going to be, especially since it seems they had run out of targets for the meanwhile.

Which was the next part of my plan. See, Hiccup's not the only one capable of planning things in advance and we both share a knack

for trying to get ourselves killed. With a paw I reached up to the top of my skull and pretended I was going to remove something that shrouded my head. And in an instant, the enchantment that maintained my dragon form quietly ended, rendering me nothing but a stick of a boy, myself, once again. "Don't shoot! Wahhh!" I shouted at the top of my lungs and then I quickly remembered why everyone except for dragons hated falling.

"Did that- Is that a boy?" I managed to hear someone.

"Hold fire!" I heard someone shout.

Thankfully, Stormfly was quick on the uptake and managed to catch me before I landed on something much harder and more unforgiving than a Nadder's spiny body. "Don't do that again!"

I gripped my aching chest. The fall still hurt and I was probably going to feel it in the morning. "Ooh, don't worry, I plan on doing this every day for the rest of my life!"

With the immediate danger out of the way, the trip down was no longer as perilous. Mother and her forces were massing just outside the archer's shooting ranges.

Stormfly descended further downwards and landed in a clearing directly below.

The Vikings all approached, weapons at the ready, awaiting for orders. "That one of them Hooligan boys?"

"That little one that claims bein' Stoick's boy?"

"And he was a dragon!"

The Vikings all commented, eying me with dangerous suspicion and disbelieving looks.

I gulped, feeling very vulnerable without a much stronger hide and weakened bones. How could my brother do any of this without thinking he'd break from anxiety on the spot? "Hey fellas!"

From out behind the Vikings, a boy emerged, one with a very stern, yet inquisitive look in his eyes. Dagur stepped forth, shoving his way through any Vikings that got in his way like he was several times larger than he actually was. "Toothless? You were that dragon! I was about to pick out the wood for a placard!" He was practically in arm's reach at this point, making me all the more nervous.

I grinned like my teeth were going to crack from the strain. "Sorry about that!"

Dagur turned his attention to my mount. "And how'd you get this stupid Nadder to listen to you? -Hey!" Stormfly responded by snatching the boy-Chief's helmet, a move that would have probably would have resulted being covered in a hail of arrows had Dagur not been so close. Dangerous, but Stormfly was always the risk taker.

I tried to keep a straight face and took the helmet from the Nadder's maw. "Uh, yeah, Stormfly doesn't like that..."

Dagur took his helmet and wiped off the spit from it and then eyed me. "Waitâ€¦ you mean you named this dragon girlfriend?"

"What? No, I mean that's Stormflyâ€¦ and wellâ€¦." I slapped myself in the head. Oh boy, me and my big mouth. Brother was so going to chew my head out for this. "Look, I can turn into a dragon and wellâ€¦" I didn't even finish that thought, mostly because I didn't know how to _not _get myself into an even bigger hole.

Dagur shook his head in clear disapproval. Yeah, brother was not going to like this. "Not as simple as changing clothes he saysâ€¦"

I cringed in an even more awkward fashion. Dagur was definitely going to demand more answers from me and I know Hiccup isn't reallyâ€¦ keen on the guy.

Stormfly then buffeted me with her wings, grabbing my attention. "The Knights are coming!" she barked.

I turned my head upwards. Mother and her forces have regrouped, surrounding the air space around the Vikings. While my human eyes could barely make out the vaguest details, I knew what was coming our way. Turning my head again, I found other dragons massing up on the ground, standing in burned out wreckage where the Vikings couldn't be sure to land a hit.

It was a simple tactic, one that hinged on the opposition being unable to retreat or mobilize enough to escape it, especially against humans. Vikings knew about flanking, about how to cause an enemy force to divide its attention on two separate fronts. Protect against one offense and be cut down by the other. Simple, brutal, and effective. This was that on multiple levels, increasing the number of fronts to massive levels. All four cardinal directions were covered, as well as their and land on both sides.

I gulped, knowing for sure Mom was not going to stop at anything. No amount of commoners lost was going to give her pause. Oh, just what has that monster done to her?

"They're after you, aren't they?" Dagur's eyes narrowed, contemplating his option. I bet he was thinking of handing us over.

I nodded, begrudgingly. There wasn't any time to hesitate or talk my way out of this, was there? Stormfly glared at the boy in the eyes, but he hardly reacted to that; he clearly knew he was in complete control over us.

"But there's so _many _of them..." Dagur hinted at.

"I say we let them take him!" said one of the other Vikings. Maybe a Chief given how decorated he looked with those furs all over him. "If the dragons want 'em, let 'em have them!"

Another, similarly fanciful one piped up. "Yeah, he could be illegitimate or-"

I stomped my foot on the ground and leveled a glare into that Viking's eyes. I know who I am; I know whose child I was now. I was not going to let anyone or anything contest that.

The Vikings laughed. "A pipsqueak like you giving a look like that don't be ridiculous. You don't even have those fancy arrows you got!"

I spat and brought my hand up to the tip of my cloak making sure they know exactly what I planned to do with it. "I don't need them right now! I can lift twice your bodyweight and then some!"

The Viking glared back.

"Toothless!" Stormfly called out with a scree. "They're coming!"

I shook my head. Oh, he was so lucky I had better things to do. "Alright, alright!" I turned back at Dagur who was still locked in that thoughtful pose.

The Chief raised an eyebrow and hummed. "So, what's in it for me?"

I sighed. Always down to this? Well, I had no clue and I was not as skilled at negotiating as Hiccup was. "What do you want?" He went straight to the point. I might as well do the same.

Dagur eyed me, his teeth showing. "Your cloak or something like it."

I cringed. I was absolutely sure about one thing and that was there was no way I was every handing this heirloom to that guy, but at the same time, I had no idea if I could make a cloak that would work for him. I mean, mine doesn't work for anyone else but me, that much we tested out. Well, I guess when it all came down, I could just give him the other method of turning into a dragon.

At that exact moment, I heard the screeching cry of a Night Fury. Mother's battle call, signalling she was ready to attack. Commoners of every description descended upon us, the first push to allow the others.

Gronckles battered their way through the Viking's ranks on ground level while Nadders unleashed cascades of flame. Huge Nightmares served as focal points to crush hardened resistance; catapults and balistae all fell to pieces at their weight.

And yet despite all of the maddened shouts and roars, a single Night Fury's call pierced them all. "Come back here!" Mother sought me out.

But the Vikings were content to stand back. They charged at their incoming foes, bearing their weapons and striking down the dragons without any regard to the danger. After all, to them, dying gloriously was the requirement for the best deals in the afterlife. They were not going to back down at flames. Axes and arrows went in every direction, attempting to pick off and deter any Nadders that got too close. Gronckles were tough, but all that bulk and speed was easily turned against them by spears. Nightmares were next, their flaming bodies burning anyone dared approach them, but the truly brave did not fear them and went in for the assault. No matter how big they were, they could get overwhelmed.

But Mother went uncontested. She blew up ranks of Vikings with every Breath and destroyed war machines without anyone able to stop her. She slowly carved up holes in the Vikings' defenses, taking them all apart one at a time. She knew better than to engage up close, that's what conscripts were for. She was content to wait it out, for she knew where I was. And I was not going to let her have me so easily.

I back at Dagur. The boy gritted his teeth and took shot at the hordes above with his own crossbow. "There's so many!" He then turned to me, noticing my attention was on him. He offhandedly shot another dragon over my head. "Well, aren't you going to do something? Last I checked this mess was yours."

I shook my head. He was right and the burden of returning the favor was on me. "Fine. I'll see what I can do later, but for now, keep the rest of Mom's- I clamped my hands over my mouth.

Dagur dropped his crossbow in surprise and the bolt was released when it hit the ground. A dragon screamed in agony as a result. "Wait! Mom?" he blinked.

Me and my big mouth. I shook my head again. "It's a long story."

Dagur picked up his crossbow. "And I bet it'll sure be interesting!" he sighed.

"I'll grab her attention, it's me she wants after all." I said. With the majority of her forces trapped her, I had little to no doubt the majority will no longer aid her pursuit. That just makes it me, her, and Stormfly.

"Incoming!" Stormfly roared. She shielded Dagur and me from a torrent of flame with her wings.

The dragons that did the deed didn't seem to notice it before they went down to fire.

Dagur pushed the Nadder's wing out of the way and launched another attack. "Fine. Fine. We'll talk later. You owe me!"

I nodded. "Right." And then turned back to Stormfly. "Let's get out of here!"

Stormfly nodded. "Let's."

I put on my cloak and shifted back into my draconic form and we flew as fast as we could. Most of the projectile weaponry at this point had been exhausted, giving us a clear shot out of the Viking's encampment.

For a split second, the dragons hardly noticed us, thinking we were one of them. I mean, it was the default after all and the chaos of battle gave us even more deniability. Though admittedly, that could be because most conscripts and Knights were more focused on earning a few more stripes. But that did not fool my mother's eyes. She saw us leaving the battle in a heartbeat. "Come back here child! Come back!" she roared.

Stormfly and I accelerated as we exited the battle, heading through the gates. Mother came right out after us, punching through her own Flight and carving a path through her own forces; I think some unlucky fool ended up getting thrown off and landing onto a spear.

We raced forth and she followed. But mother's speed was catching up to us with her preexisting momentum and greater experience in the air.

But I knew I had at least one advantage, hopefully, she forgave me for using it here and now.

I flipped myself over and rolled upside down, mid flight. My momentum kept me airborne, just a few feet above the ground. One plasma blast clipped the elder Night Fury in the wing, knocking her balance off. However, Mother was tougher than most dragons and persisted, keeping her wings forward.

I quickly flipped myself forward again, unwilling to take another shot. It was no good, and I didn't want to injure my mother. I mean, one blast was all I was willing to commit; I curse the Red Death for having me take it. I didn't have time for it anyways. I blasted open the Fortress's doors and immediately landed in it, taking off in a sprint across the stone floor. Flying was going to be too risky from here on out and I think my legs would have given me better speed.

Stormfly touched down right behind me and quickly began a dash. "This is crazy!" she shouted.

"Less talking, more running!" I snarled.

Mother, however, kept flying at her original rate and easily overtook Stormfly before landing behind me. She then lobbed a plasma blast into the ceiling, causing part of the building to cave in right behind her.

"Toothless!" shouted Stormfly and it was at this point I knew it was too late. She wasn't getting in between me and my mother any time soon.

"Stay out this!" my mother shouted at the Nadder from behind the rubble. "This is a family matter!"

I ground my teeth before realizing my teeth were retracted. I couldn't simply blast another part of the roof or the nearby walls without risking the rest of the roof to come down on us all, structures could only take so much damage before falling. Stormfly was out of the fight and there was nothing I could do about it. Curse the Red Death. If only I was more of an architect and could figure out which sections of building I could freely blast through. "Meetup by our dens! Take another route or something!" I shook my head.

Mother glared, clearly aware something was up. "What are you planning?"

"Saving you!" I said. And then took off again, bringing all four of my legs to bear. Mother continued her pursuit, which was fine by me.

I needed to bring her to my bedrooms, just so I had reasonable chance of curing her. I mean, the Red Death's spell had to break, right?

I was fast, but unfortunately that speed wasn't going to give me too much of an advantage; mother was a Night Fury herself and larger, giving her a slight advantage in speed over me. But I was younger and had the energy and the will to keep going. Unfortunately, that only meant it was a matter of time before she caught up to me.

"Toothless, abandon this resistance and come back with me!" she shouted.

"No. You should be coming with _me!"_ I declared.

We dashed through pathways and corridors, heading in and out of rooms. The Fortress was too wrecked to make predictable movement possible, with far too much rubble and bodies everywhere; I was left having to puzzle out a rough idea of where I wanted to go. I was getting there, but I was eating so much time trying to frantically find the way I needed to go. But I found a way, a simple stone staircase that led me to my destination.

It was unfortunately not made of dragons, it being far too small for a Night Fury. Actually, I take that back, that was perfect for my needs.

I removed my cloak and dash down the steps, wildly descending far faster than should be safe. I slipped and fell onto the ground on my knee, crashing into a heap. I felt dizzy, but I was far safer than before.

Mother didn't have the option I did. Her head and a part of her upper torso managed to fit the stair way, but the rest of her was just far too much mass. "Toothless! Toothless, get back here!" she wailed.

I smirked. "I will, but I've got to get something first!"

Mother pulled her body out and then tried to slam herself through the threshold, but it wasn't enough. And she wasn't likely going to blast the walls with her Breath, not if she didn't want to risk causing a cave in. I doubted she'd do that, at least, unless she wanted to cave this section in while she decided to take one of the other routes into the old dungeons.

I walked away from mother, leaving her aside while I decided to get ready to end our fight. I dusted my trousers and went forward, letting my two legs take me into the darkness. My heart pounded from my overexertion. My legs arched both from the strain and injury, but I kept going forward. It was all about to end.

The echoes of battle on the surface raged heavily, the sound of footsteps, both human and dragon alike flooded my ears. Strangely, I could swear that there was something like that nearby, like, really near. I wonder if that was just a concussion. Oh well, I'll deal with that all after mother is safe again.

I descended another flight of stairs and entered the main chamber of the dungeon, the place that led directly to the bedrooms. The tables

were deserted now, with the only remnants of people having once been there were the cooling leftovers of their interrupted dinner. The sound of rushing footsteps seemed louder now, though I couldn't explain why.

I stepped forward, deciding that I had better things to do than wait.

And then, before I could pass the tables, two dragons, a Night Fury and a Nightmare came rushing forth from the other end of the room. My reflexes took me to hiding behind one of the tables, just as they came into view.

"Come back here!" snarled the larger dragon.

"Not yet!" replied the Night Fury. Wait, was that Hiccup?

I didn't have time to puzzle that out though. The Night Fury lobbed his Breath into the Nightmare's side, the blast knocking him off balance just enough to rush into my bedroom, the door slamming shut. It all happened so fast, it was all over by the time I realized what had happened. I saw my brother, a dragon again, being chased by a Nightmare that easily earned the title "Monstrous". What happened?

The Nightmare approached the door, his nostrils letting out a burning cloud. I couldn't fathom what went on in that dragon's mind, but I was sure he was considering blasting his way in. The dragon's eyes burned into white hot pinpricks, literally. He was far from normal, maybe someone important enough to receive the Red Death's Gifts. Oh, what did Hiccup do to get this one's attention?

Well, I certainly didn't want it. I continued to hide behind the tables, keeping my mouth shut and an eye focused on the great dragon. Just being in the same room as him seemed to make the temperature rise and I was sure that it was not just my fear. I didn't turn myself back into a Night Fury, stealth was far more important now.

The dragon pawed at the door with a wing and the wood smoldered into flames. He was definitely not normal, not if his very touch set things alight. Who was he? I knew most of the Knights when I grew up and I certainly didn't remember him. Sure, I probably didn't know everyone, but I don't think I would have missed a dragon with why did those markings look like chains?

I reeled my head back in a sudden jerk, my skull hitting the top of the table in some careless act.

The dragon's suddenly backed off the door and then turned in the direction of the tables. He clearly did not like the idea of someone else being here. He shambled over to the tables and began a quick search, his nostrils sucking in air. Well, at least he wasn't going to bother Hiccup for a while, but where did that leave me?

I shivered and crawled underneath even more tables, hoping I could maybe wait things out. Why couldn't I turn into a rat or a Terror or something? Being small would be so helpful right about now.

The Nightmare seemed to grow frustrated. He knew I was here, I just

knew it, but the fact he couldn't find me filled him with a sort of horrifying brutality and might. He shoved a wing under a table and flung it against a wall, scattering wood, cups, and food against the wall. I doubted anyone would enjoy cleaning that mess up.

He didn't find me yet. I skidded across to another table, wanting to put even more distance between me and him. I didn't like the Nightmare, but I had this eerie feeling I was going to like him even less.

The dragon's head bobbed downward and scanned the area underneath the tables, his burning gaze almost felt like it was going to cause everything to turn into ashes. "I can hear your heart beatingâ€¦" he growled.

I felt my heart stop for a half second, as if my body wanted to hide by any means necessary. He definitely knew I was here, but I don't think he spotted me just yet. I didn't dare reply, knowing that would hasten my demise. But if he could hear my heart, then what options did I have?

The dragon moved forward, throwing aside even more tables and chairs, leaving nothing but splitters and burning wood in his wake. He slowly approached the table, tearing apart everything between us.

I froze, holding my breath in a vain attempt to lose him. I doubted I could take the dragon; I was far too worn out just trying to get away from Mom and this Nightmare seemed to have the stamina to engage in a prolonged fight. And I couldn't just use any delaying tactics either; Hiccup was down here with me. I don't think my brother has the skill or fighting experience to take this guy, especially since he was running away from him when he came down here.

The Nightmare was within spitting distance, well, human spitting distance at any rate. He threw even more tables against the wall, making ever increasing stockpiles of wood and scattered food. Nothing remained between us now except for a table and some chairs.

I moved my hand over to the hood of my cloak getting ready to use it. I mean, after all, I was a former Squire, a Night Fury, and good at it. I could resist the dragon no matter who or what he was.

And then the dragon snarled something, words that left me in a helpless daze as soon as he said them: "There you are my sonâ€¦"

My hand ceased to respond, as if it was no longer my own. The Nightmare's speech struck me hard, leaving me bewildered, confused andâ€¦ afraid. "... Dadâ€¦" my lips quavered.

The Nightmare rammed his body into the table, sending both it and me flying. I screamed and howled in agony, even though as luck would have it I didn't take a direct hit from the table itself. But I had no time to recover. With ice cold fear running through my veins, I rolled out of the way, just in time to avoid getting crushed to bits by an incoming chair.

The Nightmare's snout shown fierce teeth, his gaze stern. "I thought you were braver than this. But you're just like your brother, a coward!"

I lifted my hands, palms open. "I don't want to fight you!"

"You have no choice!" snarled the Nightmare. He let out a burning gout of flame, the heat hot enough that the very stones hit by it burned intensely. Not good for me.

I leapt behind a nearby table, and overturned it as if to make myself a barrier. Although a sinking feeling in me told me that it was not going to do any good. Last I checked, dried wood was far, far more flammable than stone.

Questions and ideas raced through my mind, puzzling out everything that was so wrong about this scene. I thought back to my conversation with mother earlier. Every now and again she was looking off into the distance, as if through walls and obstacles; was this what she was keeping tabs on? She told me that my father had been twisted. Was this what she meant by it? Just what happened to my father? I can understand him turning into a dragon, that was kind of long overdue, but _this?_ He was so willing to harm me and my brother.

The Monstrous Nightmare that was my father snarled. "You are so weak. Only marginally better than your own brother!" And then as if to prove the point, he let out another burning cloud, bathing the table in flame.

45. Chapter 45

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

I ran, yet I was not _afraid. _

I did not fear my father. No, I knew better. I knew what my father was really like, what he really thought. This Nightmare wasn't him. No, he was trapped somewhere in there and I had to get him out.

Staying ahead of my father was probably the most athletic and tiring thing I ever did, above and beyond anything else I did a few months ago, and that was including _all the other times I had run for my life. _It's funny how much I've had to run away. Pretty much all of my enemies were the type that I couldn't stand up and face in an even fight and I had no real choice in the matter but to escape. Now though, I was not running to save my skin, but rather to gain an _edge._

My Dad was surprisingly fast, more than you'd think to expect from such a big dragon. His size probably offset the fact that his shape was poorly suited to running or maybe it was part of whatever boost being the King's employ gave him; it didn't matter, all that matter was that I reached my end goal with enough time to get what I wanted.

Unfortunately, my body was tiring out, the stress and fading remnants of healed injuries taking their toll. My body could heal over most any wound, but fatigue was my biggest problem. I couldn't face my father if I couldn't so much as lift my own feet; I had to end this and soon.

Even more unfortunately, my father was not going to let that be easy for me. He snarled, "You will not escape me." Then, he breathed a cone of flame, this time a sustained torrent that swept back and forth, side to side.

Alarm surged up within me and I had to pull my tail in between my legs as I kept going. The fire barely reached me then, but I suddenly came to understand why other animals only did it in their direst moments. It was so awkward.

My father's flaming breath was intense, the heat being _everything but comforting_, which said plenty about its danger. I practically felt my scales welting just from exposure and I was running away from the source.

I panted deep and hard, struggling to bring forth the last of my plasma blasts. I needed to buy as much time as I could, it needed to count. How fast does rock fall again?

I shot at the ceiling and brought a huge chunk of it crashing down. I slid underneath, just ahead of the falling rubble, evading all but a few smidgens of dust. Father however was far larger and slower. He ran into the collapsing ceiling without stopping, creating a loud thump. I turned my head back for a moment and found that father didn't punch his way through.

I breathed a sigh of relief and stopped, regaining what little of my breath I could before resuming my escape. I doubted that killed my father, even if he was purely human, I would have bet on him surviving.

And true to my predictions, it seemed Dad lived after all. The stony rubble glowed red as something within it burned, lighting the rock with such intense heat I wondered if it would melt. Then again, given that displays I've seen from Dad so far, a better question might have been "how long?". When I saw what my father was doing, I turned tail and ran again. We were at the home stretch and I needed the gap as wide as possible to do what I needed to do.

One more corridor down, I saw a wide flight of stairs heading down. While they were admittedly way too small for my now massive feet to properly use, that didn't matter, I was here. I descended, recklessly at with all possible haste.

And wouldn't you know it, that ended up costing me. I twisted my leg or slipped on something and suddenly I found myself tumbling down, landing at a heap on the floor. Funny, I guess something never change. I shook my head, trying to get control of myself from the dizziness the spinning room.

But I didn't have the time for that. I heard a loud roar coming from right behind me, one that seemed to grow even more intense as time went on. That was not good, not good at all.

I rolled off my back and onto all fours and then leapt forward, just narrowly avoiding at least a ton of Monstrous Nightmare coming right on top of me. "You think you're so clever!" he snarled.

"No, not really." So much for buying time. I just ended up wasting it trying to recover from a slip up. Just like how things usually are,

right?

The chase resumed as if nothing happened, but soon it was all about to end.

I dove ahead of my father, leading the chase. We suddenly found ourselves in the dining area within the long ago repurposed dungeons. The remnants of an interrupted dinner still languished cold and uneaten, their owners having been taken for battle long ago. That was fine by me, the less people involved the better.

I leapt over a table, my powerful legs sending me forward and then absorbing the fall as if it was just a normal part of walking. I zigzagged my way through the isle, frantic agility and the pounding in my heart giving me that kind of power. Father did not even bother with such things, as if they were beneath him. He shoved his way through tables and kitchenware as if they were tunics on a clothesline, not even caring for the kind of damage he dealt to his surroundings or himself—actually, was he even damaging himself? "Come back here!" he roared.

I poured what little strength I had left into my lower thighs and took off in a burst of speed. It was all or nothing now. "Not yet!" I denied. And then taking the last bit of dragons breath I had left, I shot it at my own father.

The dragon recoiled as the blast hit him in the side, probably hitting a weak spot. The dragon jerked back, his right side ceasing to respond for a moment while his left still tried to act like everything was fine. He skidded a few feet off before regaining control and resuming the chase.

But that split second distraction was enough.

I dashed into the open door and into my room. With a single forceful kick, I slammed the door shut so hard that it caused the locking mechanism to click and the doorbar to land into its resting spot.

Dad then ran into the door, his body slamming into the wood with a heavy thud. The door held firm but rattled from the shock, cracks forming in the walls with a sagging thud. For a brief moment, I toyed with the idea that maybe my father was not able to get me from here. But I was a fool to even consider the idea. The door started lighting up, as if a fire was starting to burn through from the other side. Instead of choosing to break the door down with force, my father chose to simply wait for it to burn away from his though.

I hurriedly backed away from the door, knowing that my time was short. I went over to Toothless's bed, knowing he kept his extra things underneath.

I overturned my brother's bed and began to look for what I wanted, but then I found something rather disturbing. Toothless's crossbow sat there, unused, unloaded and certainly not ready to fire. Why was it here and not in my brother's hands? And if it was here—then what did Toothless have? Was he going through the battle _unarmed?_

A sinking feeling welled up in my chest, but I pushed it back. I

really did not have time to deal with that. I had my own father to worry about first. Once I get him sorted we could both find him or what's left of him.

Pushing back that uncomfortable thought for a moment, I found what I was looking for. My little brother kept a small box about the size of a pair of shoes underneath his bed. While he often carried his Moving on. Anyways, ever since father was taken away, my little brother kept a habit of getting as many of his "special" crossbow bolts within close proximity to him as possible. But that turned out to not be enough for him, so he's also made it a habit to keep enough extras on hand and this box held them all.

I overturned the box, scattering its contents to the ground dozens of seemingly identical bolts fell all over, their own distinguishing features were slightly different engravings on the tips and the colored strings that were wrapped around each and every one of them. Most of them were red, my brother's explosive bolts, the ones that he created to replicate the destructive dragons breath of a Nightfury. Yet a few were labeled green with a silver engraved tip, setting them apart as the arrows that started this mess in the first place. In the past few months, my brother and I think we've figured all we needed to know about those arrows. Everything we learned showed them as being some sort of spell destroying weapon, able to undo enchantments and charms. And it was those bolts I needed; they undid the spell the King placed upon me, surely they could undo the one placed on my father.

I lowered my head over to the nearest bolt, planning to wrap my tongue around the thing. I might not have had hands but maybe all I needed to do was spit it in my father's general direction and

"DO NOT TOUCH IT!" ****

I jerked my head back in a sudden startled surprise, not expecting the loud, booming voice to speak to me like that.. I turned my head in a thousand different directions, trying to find the origin of it, but it seemed to come from nowhere at all; no one else was here.

"**Of course not" the voice replied as if aware of my thoughts.

And then I felt like slapping myself. The reason I couldn't find the speaker nor could I figure out where the voice came from was that he was not here to be found. And yet he still spoke to me to me. Distance didn't matter.

"Clever." ****

I glowered at no one in particular, thinking that the speaker would be able to see the expression on my face. I knew who it was and I was honestly not surprised to find him talking to me at this point in time. "The Red Death," I said.

The voice seemed amused by the title, as if amused by the audacity. **"**I have been called many things throughout history, though that is a new one I will admit." ****

I shook my head. I was having a conversation with the Red Death, the King of dragons. He was one of a long list of a growing list of foes and yet he was so...cordial with me. Toothless would probably rip my head off if he knew about this. Or probably shout at my ear to deliver a few hate filled messages. I was thinking about doing the same.

The King seemed to pick up my thoughts as if I was an open book to him. Now that he was here, I could practically feel it, his very presence rifling through my being. **"We have much to discuss. I take it you understand already how this connection began."**

I put my paw to the pavement and it shone with a faint golden light, etching bright letters into the stone. 'I KNOW' I had my suspicions ever since Mildew brought up the possibility of a spy, but it was only now that I truly understood that it could have only been me from the beginning. Ever since I received the Red Death's "Gift" that let me write on anything as a dragon, he had invested a part of his...awareness into me, letting me take it wherever I went. Through it, he knew things I knew, saw the things I saw and I didn't even know it until now. Astrid might have dealt with the King and Toothless and the other Squires might have lived under the great dragon their lives, but I was the only one to ever receive power from him, even if it was something so humble.

The King seemed delighted by my thoughts. **"You are quite the thinker. I have no doubt that had things gone differently, you would have made a great Knight."**

I frowned, I didn't want anything to do with that title, not when he was the one giving it. I didn't hate him the same way as my brother did, not by a longshot, but I didn't want anything to do with him, not after his betrayal.

I suddenly felt the room's temperature drop by several hundred degrees, as if everything went cold. **"I lived up to my terms of the bargain."** The King's tone was harsher than before, as if holding back something just beneath the surface. I was not too afraid, my frustrations keeping me forward.

"You took my parents from me and my brother!" If I could actually look the dragon in the eye, I would have done so, but as it was, I only had the ceiling to look forward to. Toothless might have been more vocal about expressing his views, but I had my own metaphoric axe to grind. And now was the perfect time to take a swing. "Did you really need to do any of that? You could have just let go back home, live the rest of our lives!"

"Yes." The King spoke, in a stern and firm tone. He was unmoved by my words as if his heart was made of stone. **"If you had allowed me and followed your parents, I could have protected you."**

I blinked several times trying to grasp at the King's thoughts. He thought he was protecting us by kidnapping our parents? I was crazy, but the great dragon was insane.

The Red Death continued to speak to me, knowing full well all the questions in my head. **"Time and time again, the Herd have brought nothing but suffering to our Kin. I simply allowed your father to escape that endless cycle."**

My throat went hard as I tried to swallow my anger and contained fury. "I don't see how anything you id spared me or my brother from suffering!" I've spend a good part of the night just trying to survive my own father. He might have had good reason from his point of view, but all I could see was that the King's perceptions were warped, twisted. I didn't hold back as I spun a biting accusation."You broke the agreement you had with my father and then enslaved him? You manipulated my mother into serving your ends, keeping her away from us for years, all for what? What kind of _king_ are you?" And I was pretty sure he had something to do about Astrid.

"**ONE THAT WILL RESTORE ORDER!" **he answered right back... and what an answer it was.

I fell to the ground, stunned. My head pounded several times over as if I was hit several times with a hammer the size of Gobber's fist. The great dragon's response was loud, really, really loud that if it had been actual speech instead of thought, the whole island would have shook.

I felt the King's prescence still there, still present, but I could feel him with drawing almost as if in apology. **"Forgive thatâ€| outburst."**

"... That's fine." I stood, managing to make a few aching groans. Just what was that about? I must have hit a sore spot or something, something big. If the King's response was anything, he really felt strongly about the topic of upholding agreements, at least as long as he wasn't accused about breaking them. And what was that part about "restoring order"? What kind of order are we talking about.

I shook my head. I think I was done with thisâ€| nonsense. I had way too much on my plate and I didn't want to deal it until I fixed the issue with my dad. I turned back to the arrows and then had a stray thought. They could damage spells right? So what if Iâ€|

"**Do not do that, child!"** the King warned.

"And why not?" I snapped. I wanted the connection between me and the King gone, no more spying right at me. Destroying it would be the simplest thing to do. All I had to do was give myself a poke.

"**And the last time that happened, you ended up nearly dying due to violent decompression of your inner cavity." **The King replied.

Strangely, I looked back at that moment with a little bit of fondness. I mean, it was at that time I learned about Toothless being my brother. I was not that afraid of hurting myself again. Hey, knowing my luck, if I did, I'd have another uncle or something. "I could just poke a finger."

"**Our bond is not so easily undone,"** said the King. **"and I would rather you avoid giving yourself any lasting injuries, especially through mishandling such dangerous objects."** The Red Death still baffled me. I mean, just what kind of twisted set of ideas leads him toâ€| doing all sorts of inconsistent things. He doesn't mind twisting pledges yet he loathes the idea of letting me lose a finger.

What were his motives? Actually, that gave me an idea.

"So, what would you give me if I _didn't _try to stab myself?" I asked. The funny thing was, I could practically feel the King actually trying to think up the terms of the agreement, as if he was seriously considering my bargain. If there were any strange deals that had to be made, of course I was going to be the one making them.

"**What do you desire?" **asked the King, his tone all sorts of confused and worried. Although, that could have been a lie, a part of me really wondered if the King was really capable of lying at all. I mean, he's clearly demented on some level, but that doesn't mean he's a liarâ€¦| okay, that's not a rabbit hole I think anyone should explore.

I wonder if he was even think up ways to twist my promiseâ€¦| or if he was even bothering when the goal was so simple. Regardless, I think it would be wise to make sure my terms weren't the kind that were easily subverted. Now, my first choice would have been to ask for my parents, but I had a gut feeling that was too high a price for the King. So, I went for something smaller, something I knew would be easy for both of us to agree on and hard to subvert. "Break our connection." I didn't want him using me as his unwitting spy anymore.

"**I cannot do that,**" said the King

"Fine," I said. Whether or not it was a matter of him being incapable or unwilling, it didn't matter, I had another way to achieve the same result. "Then, I ask you never to use our connection to listen in, look through me, or anything else having to do with me without first asking me while I am conscious and fully aware and informed about the decision." Okay, that might have been a tad overkill, but after seeing several of the King's plots in action, a part of me wonders if it was still enough.

"**Done," **said the great dragon. **"I will abide by those limitations set by you, provided you do not risk damaging yourself by handling it such a dangerous item."**

"Right." I glowered. I guess that was good enough for me, something simple and with a few strings attached as I could make it it. But that left me wondering about how I was going to use those crossbow bolts to fix my father if I couldn't touch them. And, wait, why hasn't he burst through the door yetâ€¦|?

I turned back to door for a moment. The door was partially burned through, but still mostly intact. I think I could break through it if I ran through fast enough; Dad should have busted it down and the wall while he was at it.

My gaze went skyward. "What happened?" I spoke to the King.

No reply.

"Answer me."

He did not respond.

I sighed. Great, the one time I was hoping for him to interpret the pact different, he doesn't show. And he was just here a second ago.

From outside, I could hear the sound of wood crunching and breaking against brute force. My father must have still been outside and overturning the dining tables. What was he doing? I approached the door and placed my ear on it, letting my sharp hearing do the the work for me.

"I don't want to fight you!" I heard from on the other side of the door. Wait, was that Toothless? When did he get here andâ€¦ why was he here?

"You have no choice!" I heard my father snarl.

My heart sank even lower than when my father tried blasting me to death. My little brother was going to get burned by my own father! And unlike me, he didn't turn into a dragon when burned.

Panic shot through my limbs and I went into action. I blasted the door down with a quick burst, doing what my father should have done long before. After taking a break and recovering during my chat with the King, I was definitely beginning to regain some of my missing strength, especially my shot limit.

Neither Toothless nor my father noticed me in time, both wrapped up in their own business to realize the door to the room had fallen out and the Night Fury to come rushing out.

I dashed with utmost haste and slammed my father in the chest, causing him to miss his shot, hitting a wall several feet off the mark. I felt my scales burn and welt from the sheer heat on contact with my burning father, but it was nothing compared to the sheer agony Toothless might have felt as an ordinary stick of a boy up until he was reduced to ash.

Father growled and shoved me off of him, flames pouring out of his nostrils. Unlike other dragons, Dad seemed to lack a shot limit, on top of his flames being that intense. "Get off!" he snarled.

I leaped off and landed on all fours, standing in the midpoint between me and my brother.

I turned to Toothless to see how he was doing. He was fine and oddly enough dressed up in the cloak our grandfather left us. All my brother could do was just stare at me with an odd look of bewilderment in his eyes. "Uhâ€¦ thanks for the save."

I nodded. Yeah, I was glad to offer it. I turned back to father, to keep an eye out for him to pull a sucker punch. "Get inside and get theâ€¦ weapon." I shook my head. We made up a term for bows and crossbows before with the help of Meatlug, but after all this fighting and chaos I couldn't remember it.

Toothless didn't reply, he instead just went inside our room, clearly understanding what I wanted him to do.

Father roared and attempted to jump toward him, but I countered with a tackle on my own. He shoved me off him with contemptuous ease, but

I managed to stop his attack before it began.

Toothless came back not a moment too soon, his crossbow in his hand and several bolts in his hip loaded pouch, still wearing his Night Fury shaped cloak just incase for when things aren't enough.

Our father snorted. "Ha, so both of you finally grew a little backbone and decide to fight me?"

"No." I said. Steeling myself for in the event we needed to fight. Toothless only really needed to land a single hit with those special bolts. While I was under the assumption that normal projectiles might burn or melt before coming into contact with father's skin, I was sure that the unique properties of these bolts would have been enough. "We're going to help you?"

Father laughed as if the idea was some sort of joke. "From what?"

"The Red Death has you under some sort of spell!" Toothless answered, holding his weapon high and his fingers on the trigger. "We'll end it!"

Father laughed harder and harder. "You can't!"

"We will!" I denied him and then went straight at my own father with a great leap forward. Father countered lashing his tail in a swing.

Toothless let loose his bolt, but father evaded the attack, surprising for a dragon so large. He lifted one huge wing and let it come crashing down near my brother's head.

Toothless leapt backward and Dad almost had time to correct his wingarm's descent to land blowâ€¦ but not before I leapt on top of him from behind, digging my claws into flesh to maintain the hold. My teeth came down near back. Father wailed and lashed out in every direction, violently trying to shake me off. My grip slowly began to slip and I let go, leaping off of my father to land a few feet away, sliding slightly as I did. Hopefully, I was far enough away for when the show started.

Toothless, in the time that I bought him, hastily retreated some distance away, taking cover behind an overturned table. Once he put enough distance between me and our father, he let out a short volley. The entire room burst in showers of explosions and noise, my brother's first real invention blasting our father with a short litany that was every bit as powerful as a Night Fury's plasma blast.

If he had been himself, our father might not have survived the attack, but Toothless and I knew better at this point. When my brother emptied the five shot magazine of his weapon, Father leapt right at Toothless, a fury in his roars and firing jetting out his his breath.

I tackled father again, this time directly in front of him, hoping to muster enough strength to force him to stand down or serve as a distance. I went through his flames, my skin blistering from the heat, but I was desperate enough now that that that was the sane

choice. Dad recoiled and was forced to stand on his rear legs, as I forced my push to keep him back, my upper legs going onto his chest. Father recovered though and forced more weight onto his legs as he prepared to push back. I stood on my rear legs as well, hoping to divert more force to keep my father off balance. If we had both been human, Dad would have pushed me aside with contemptuous ease, but at least I could hold my own.

Our grapple was however going to be short lived. "What is the matter, boy, growing tired?" Growling, father put more and more force into his push, causing me to waver and slowly get pushed down to earth, making each successive attempt all the more easy as he got to employ more and more of his weight against me. But being short lived was all that I needed it to be. Out in the corner of my eye, I saw Toothless readying another bolt, one with a silver tip.

I narrowed my eyes and met my father's one last time, hopefully the last time ever. "No," I growled. "You're not beating us!" Hopefully Dad wouldn't break free all too soon, but there was this growing feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach.

"I have!" he sneered.

"No, we have!" Toothless declared.

Father turned his neck around to see Toothless readying his crossbow aiming to shoot him. Father glared as if waiting for him to do the deed. "Well, aren't you going to do it?" he dared.

Toothless glared back and for a moment, it looked as if my little brother was going to do it, not a hint of fear or hesitation in his eyes.

And then, that dread feeling in my stomach became insurmountable, as if the very core of my being turned ice cold as a wave of sudden fear washed over me. Images flashed through my head, about how everything could go wrong at the last second, about how my brother could miss and hit me instead, landing a fatal blow, about how the arrows would fail to break the King's spell, about how in a freak set of circumstances, my own brother's crossbow would jam and cause the bolt to detonate while it was still loaded. Everything in me told me to give up, give in to despair. I backed down from my father, letting the grapple end, much to my father's surprise. I felt like shivering, quivering at the unknown sensation that caused my heart to beat in a rapid pace.

My little brother also shivered, his body quivering in panic. He couldn't hold onto his crossbow and more and his shaking hands made aiming nigh impossible. As the fear in my heart grew, it seemed like he was turning almost pale. His crossbow slipped from his hands and uselessly dropped to the floor.

About the only thing that seemed to scare me more was how we had been reduced to this. I was willing to help get my father shot by a magical arrow and try to pin him down a second ago and Toothless was willing to do the shooting; where did all of that courage and valor go? What could have taken it away?

Father seemed rather annoyed by our sudden lack of will to fight, letting us back away. He turned down a smaller corridor where now

that I weren't so distracted by the sound of battle I could hear the sound of stones getting crushed. Soon, a wave of Gronckles came down the shaft, mounding on the walls to widen a path for those who came right after, one in particular drew my interest.

"... Mom!" Toothless gasped, his voice all sorts of fearful as if he was struggling to speak. I didn't blame him, I was suffering from sudden crippling anxiety myself, enough that my vocal cords wouldn't budge on their own and my limbs felt ice stiff.

The elder Night Fury stepped through the Gronckles, the smaller dragons getting out of the way as she approached. She looked at my brother with a stern look, sort of like the one she used when she was close to anger, but on a much different face. She said nothing, but Dad sure did.

Other dragons came right after her, Nadder, more Gronckles, even a Nightmare and from the other hallway I could hear more coming this way. I wonder how many of them were familiar with the odd family matters we were wrapped up in. They probably had a basic idea, what with a great number of events happening for all to see.

"Mate, why would you interrupt us?" our father declared. Wait, was Mom really the source of all of that insurmountable fear that ran through my veins? Dad sure acted like she was the one responsible. "Now I will not know if our sons have at least a shred of warrior blood in them!"

Mother bowed her head and then turned back to our father, slamming our foot down. "It matters not. We must bring them home first."

The exceptionally Monstrous Nightmare grumbled something as if upset by the declaration. "Fine, but afterwards we have to go over retraining them! They are weak!"

"Later." Mother scowled as if this was conversation they had a hundred times before. Well, technically, they did way back when, but last time I stuck around for a conversation like the mood was much more peaceful. I felt the fear and dread in me grow as mother approached, almost as if the icy cold was being projected from her body directly. You know, that suddenly explains a great deal of Mom's reputation as a Knight, it wasn't just that she was bitter, but that she also held power over fear. I mean, it was certainly a powerful Gift. "I don't like using this power, everyone hates me for it!" she said, confirming my suspicions.

Toothless looked like he was about to break down and collapse, as if the only thing helping him stand was the fact that his own fear was keeping him from budging from where he stood. "Mom!" he groaned. "Please don't."

"I have to," she said, her tone almost regretful. "For your sake." She then turned to look at me, she probably would have shown a tear if Night Furies could cry. "I'm sorry for having to do this to you, too."

"I'm... fine." I choked out. This was crazy; I couldn't even budge. I wish I had known about all this, so I could have prepared something before hand. But this never really got brought up and I don't think I recall many stories about people being paralyzed by a

Night Fury from sheer inexplicable terror alone. Then again, I don't think many Vikings would admit to that and I think mother's aura seemed to be proximity based, maybe it was not as so impactful when she was up in the darkened sky? Or maybe she was focusing all of her power to keep us from moving? I don't know what her mental state was, but I imagine it wasn't pretty.

Mother simply nodded and turned to the other dragons, they were shivering themselves, but not so much they were utterly paralyzed by imagined doubts. Father turned as well, giving orders to his Flight. There was no doubt about it, he was their leader, I mean the King's mental— whatever it was probably kept that if there was anything left of my father still surviving. "Restrain them for our return to our Lord; keep them secure or I will have you heads!" I really didn't want to think about what'd happen to us when the King had me and my brother, but that aura that surrounded mother made me think of them anyways.

"Delay that order!" another voice shouted in response. We all turned our heads and down the larger entrance came Astrid, shoving her way through the dragons that slowly trickled into the dungeons. She was mostly recognizably human, but that was slowly fading away, her arms having grown more winglike and her skin taking on a bluish tinge.

Father growled at the newcomer. "What are you doing here? Stay back!"

Mom shook her head. "No, we should probably order your Flight to take her along as well. She is important!"

"I am important," Astrid said. "And I am ordering _my Flight_ to not listen to _you._" _

I blinked my eyes several times. What was Astrid talking about? Her Flight? When did she become a Commander? Was she the spy after all? Mom and Dad were also looking at her like she was talking utter nonsense.

Astrid looked at me, a nervous smile on her face. And here I thought it was my job to come up with the crazy ideas. "Trust me," she whispered. Like I really had a choice. She turned back to the dragons, and spoke to them. "Did you forget that you work for me? You swore an Oath right?"

The dragons all approached her, all giving my girlfriend several sniffs as if to confirm her identity. They seemed to know her but they clearly had no clue about what she was saying.

"They can't understand you!" I told her. I found it easier to talk now; maybe mother's spell was weakened due to Astrid's sheer audacity, I mean, she just practically stood there blinking while letting my girlfriend have all the attention. "You're still talking too... Herd like." I shook my head. So, Astrid extracted an Oath of service from the dragons that make up my Dad's flight, when did this happen? I guess she must have done _something_ noteworthy while I was busy being the King's pawn. Whatever, I'll translate. "She wants to know why you aren't serving her? Apparently, she claims to be your Flight Commander."

"Well we were made to swear a life-debt," said one Gronckle.

A Zippleback spoke up next, both heads speaking the words in unison. "She let us free from the Herd."

"But _I am the Flight Commander_" declared my father, growling at the dissenting dragons. "You work for me!"

"But they were sworn into serve Astrid, _first!"_ I replied. Okay, so maybe I can't out muscle Dad, but maybe, just maybe I could press Astrid's claim to get a manpower advantage. Dad might have been tough as nails, but even he had his limits, even as the most monstrous Monstrous Nightmare ever.

Astrid looked at me with an appreciative grin.

Father snorted a fury of smoke and fire. "I was given command of a Flight, the highest station and office underneath the King's authority! And you plan on undermining _my _authority?"

"Astrid's authority is greater than yours," I said. I sat on my rear and straightened my back, trying to look more authoritative. Mother's spell was hardly a shadow of what it once was, the fear replaced by the hope that things will turn out well. "I mean, which oath takes precedence, the older or newer oath of service?"

"You are outlaws against the King's authority! Her right ought to be suspended!"

"And that prevents them from serving Astrid how?" I asked. "The King expects Oaths to be upheld over all else, I mean, when I first met him he _congratulated _my brother for deciding to fight back against Ruseclaw's Flight for causing distress among the Herd. Yes, that's right, the King expects you to defend the _Herd _if you're a guest of theirs! Against his own forces! Call me crazy, but don't you think that applies to this situation?"

Several dragons began discussing amongst themselves, trying to piece together the logic I used or come up with justifications for siding with Astrid. Admittedly, I didn't actually know if that was really what the King believed or if it was some sort of ploy of his, because I kind of wasn't awake for all of that, but given that he thinks that upholding hospitality mandates potentially killing a disrespectful brother, I wouldn't put it past him. He was nuts enough.

My father however was not so easily convinced. He roared at the dragons who even considered the idea of supporting the mad ideas I spouted. "This is treason!"

"Against who?" I countered.

"Yeah, they're _mine, _after all!" declared Astrid, arms crossed.

Several dragons have finally made up their minds and approached us, sitting near us and bowing their heads over in servitude. I'll admit it was probably the strangest thing I had ever done, twisting the King's own mandates and sense of honor to convince the dragons under him to work under me, but well, it seemed like it was working.

Dad lost it and let a vicious howl. He snapped his teeth at the nearest dragon who dared to side with us.

"Hey!" Astrid coughed, not liking someone was taking out her servitors.

I narrowed my eyes. I doubted father, or at least the Nightmare that used to be my father, would do accept this. Which is why my desperate gambit hinged on another plot, one that I really hope my Mom would one day forgive me for. She was just sitting there, looking at us, a daze in her eyes; I was going to give a rude wakeup call. "Then we'll fight over it, to the death. Winner gains the leadership of the Flight!"

Astrid grinned, her smile full of sharp teeth.

Father growled, narrowing his eyes. "Fine, then I acce-

"No!" declared out mother. "Husband, concede," she murmured. "This contest is not safe." Little waves of fear washed over me and my friends again as mother's focus had been restored, but it was all loose and disorganized, weak in comparison to the crippling field a moment before. Mom probably didn't have the strength to use it again or maybe there was just too many people to scare or maybe I dug deep enough to find what little bravery I had. It didn't matter, she knew couldn't scare us from conceding.

Father growled, eyes rolling. The head in the room rose several degrees. "They challenge my authority! And plan to take away command from me."

"Let them have it!" mother whimpered. "Is it really worth losing our Eldest?" It broke my heart to do this, but I knew if I was going to set up a lopsided challenge that required me to get myself killed, Mom would step in to avert it. I don't know the full details of what the relationship between my parents was at this point, but Dad at least seemed to act a little closer to normal around her.

"I will not!"

"Hey!" Toothless declared, drawing my family's attention. "Listen to her!" He held up his weapon in a threatening gesture, the crossbow primed and ready to strike down one of my parents.

Father glared at him. "Stay out of this."

Mother brought her neck over to father side, gently rubbing it against his own, subtly throwing his attention to somewhere else. It didn't look like she was suffering the same intense heat that radiated of our father, but then again, Dad didn't seem to notice the fear that slowly welled up in everyone else's heart. Might have been a Flight Commander thing. "We have to go," she declared. "We lost too much and we'll lose too much more engaging in this contest at a time like this."

Father growled not liking it but he nodded his head. "Fine" he turned back to look at Astrid his gaze white hot, literally. "I concede."

Astrid nodded. "Then I release you to go, but everyone else of my

Flight shall stay with me."

Dad glared even harder. "Very well." And then he turned to leave, walking out the larger corridor, every step hard enough to feel like it shook the room; it was like he had been transformed into a walking volcano.

Mother turned one last look at us, giving an unreadable expression and then left along side her husband.

"You're all staying with us," I said to dragons for Astrid. She didn't speak Dragonese/Draconic yet, though that was slowly changing. "Those of her Flight must stay behind, everyone else, you're free to go."

Many dragons left to follow the defeated Flight Commanders, but still others approached us, bowing their heads in a proclamation in servitude. It was all strange, I'll be honest. Astrid had her own Flight at her command, well, technically. I mean, not every dragon that served another was part of a Flight, but there were enough joining under Astrid's banner, or maybe wing was more appropriate, that it might as well have been one.

I turned to Astrid letting out a sigh. "Boy, this is all going to take some explaining. I don't think our host was going to like it." Dagur and pretty much every Chief was going to be asking for an explanation on why there were somewhere over a dozen dragons bowing their heads over to my girlfriend all awaiting order from a Flight Commander who was only partially a dragon. I mean, that's the sort of behavior that gets Vikings to reconsider everything they know in the world. I was wondering as well, but I had an idea on when this might have all started.

She smiled. "Well, at least we have some of our Kin to work with."

I frowned. I really wonder if we couldn't undo...whatever it was the King did to my girlfriend.

Toothless also gave a relieved sigh, releasing his crossbow from his hands. "Uh, Hiccup, we're probably going to be needing to explain a few things to Dagur."

I squinted. "Like what?"

"Uh... everything?"

The dragons looked at us, curiously, probably wondering what was even going on. I didn't blame them.

46. Chapter 46

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Everything was too bright, bright enough to pierce an infinite void.

My eyes were forced open by the stinging bright light of the morning

sun, the kind that refused allowing anyone to remain sleeping. But I wasn't my useless brother, I was going to be up and about. I just wanted the sun to go away first.

I raised my wing to block the light, hoping to buy my eyes some precious time to adjust before beginning the day proper. But my wings wereâ€¦ failing at their job. The light pierced through them easily, almost as if it completely bypassed my thick leathery membranes like they weren't even there. Shouldn't they have offered a little reprieve?

I brought my wing closer to my snout, hoping that would solve the problem. It didn't.

Strange, my wings seemed a little off. My membranes were missing andâ€¦ why were they so...

I screamed, realizing just what was wrong. My wings they wereâ€¦ they were too pink, too stick like. I had these strange paws that pulsed and moved in strange and alien fashions. Each little end acted on its own accord, wildly shaking without paying much mind to its brethren. These paws were maddeningly disturbing!

But that wasn't all that was wrong with me. The rest of me was just as pale, without a single trace of my reddened coat. I couldn't see my snout anymore and what little I could was just barely into view. My mouth was too short, ugly and full of dull teeth. There was this overgrown canopy of furs that sprang from my top that went down past my new, overly shortened neck. My legs were far too long, almost like sticks, overly slim. My chest meanwhile seems to have grown disproportionately in contrast to everything else. I must have been so disgusting, so out of shape. Even the dull aches that I got from blunt injury and strenuous activity seemed pale in comparison.

And for even more insult to injury, I was covered in these furs that I had no clue on how to undo. They were not some blanket, but rather those coverings the Herd was so obsessed with during the outside. With my awkwardly moving paws, I could tell there was thisâ€¦ cold thing around my neck, some sort of plant with a hard stone of some sort attached to it. I bet I was practically indistinguishable from one of them, those lowly animals.

I growled in frustration.

And just when I thought I was done dealing with these sorts of things. A few months ago, if anyone told me about Kin turning into Herd or the other way around, I would have laughed them off and asked grandfather to fly to offender to some sort of mad voyage.

When my King demonstrated the Herd female turning into a Nadder during what I had hoped to be the first step of a long and prosperous life, I simply thought it was an idle curiosity. After all, if my King could grant all sorts of power to my Kin if they proved their worth, simply turning Herd into Kin seemed like a similar boon for a different, lower caste. And then just after that, I saw the infamous Flight Commander Dead Wings turning into one of the Herd.

At first I thought it was some sort of boon, but then, I really didn't see how that could have been an advantage. I mean, Herd were so weak without their things after all. Slowly, I began to realize

that the Flight Commander was like the Nadderâ€¦ and she was forsaking her boons. That was so unreal to me, how could anyone choose to undo what makes them so much better? I ran, not wanting to be lured into the that mess. I asked my Lord for answer about that night, but he simply told me that it was a temporary arrangement.

Sure enough, he was right, as when the ice melted, the Flight Commander was back in duty and once again leading our King's Flights to glory. Although, I don't really understand what went on a few weeks back, other than Dead Wings returned and brought along this incredibly strong, yet aged Monstrous Nightmare. But a part of me is wondering if he was anything like the other Flight Commander, they seemed to know each other well, almost too well.

Either way, I decided to put all thatâ€¦ madness behind me. The King had broken free from the Nest sometime during then and he has made known his intentions to start what he deemed a "Golden Age". As part of that plan, I was to be enlisted as a Squire to the newest Flight. It was easy to forget about anything else when my dreams were slowly becoming a reality. I would have made myself a great Knight and then a Flight Commander if I was given the time for it.

And then the madness found me. On my first major outing after just being freshly minted and assigned for duty, I find myself thrown into a Herd nest by some sort of freak of Herd and then I met another pair determined to antagonize me. Except that that one of them happened to be my aloof and lazy brother and I was sure the other was his undeserving Liege. It was bad enough I had to meet them, but no, they had to do something even worse and infinitely more shameful!

I groaned and kept my head to the floor. It hurt; when they forced me into this pitiful body, I didn't notice what they had did until I hit my head against the ground because I lacked the wings to stay afloat. I hope none of my Kin knew about what happened, I had appearances to upkeep after all. In fact, I better find a way to escape this mess and undo this curse before anyone I knew noticed me.

I looked around. I was in one of those Herd dwellings that were made of harvested trees. Their nests were all sorts of breakable, and far too burnable for any of my Kin, but unfortunately, I didn't have that did I? The ports in the walls the sunlight filtered through were all rather small, with little slabs of barring me from using them to make my escape. I scowled to myself. If I couldn't get out the easy way, there should still be a way for me to leave. How did Herd leave their own dwellings?

I looked around some more and found this differently colored slab of wood different from the walls. I think Herd used these, based on the small amount of things I seen them do during last night's siege.

I went on all fours and crawled over to the the entrance. It felt so awkward doing that, my lower legs didn't bend the right way and were far too long for moving. I know the Herd used only their lower legs to move, but I was protesting my current state of affairs.

Once I was right in front of the wooden panel I began trying to pound my way through it. I know Herd opened this thing via some strange power, but how?

After slamming my body several times against the wood, I realized I was making no progress and looked for an alternate rout. I searched the wooden panel, finding this strangeâ€| bulb jutting from the left side. Was this what I was searching for?

I moved my jaw over to the strange bulb and tried biting it, but my jaws were too small. Stupid beasts and their overly complex designs. Why not just have the entrances to their dens be like any other sane persons, open?

I struggled against the bulb, knowing my freedom was just an action away from me opening the obstruction. I pawed at it several times and wiggled and responded. I knew what I needed to do. And then after enough pawing, I found the wooden panel open and slide outward.

My heart leapt, my moment of triumph was here!

And then I saw the paw on the bulb on the other side and the group it belonged to.

"You're awake!" said one golden furred Herd in what I thought to be surprise. It was not an adult, but it seemed large enough to pass on for one. They were certainlyâ€| bigger than me. It was so strange, I had gotten so used to being bigger than most other Kins save my Lord and now these creatures were so much larger. It was even worse as I was so close to the ground.

"You feeling okay?" said another Herd, it having brownish fur.

I blinked several times, trying to process it. Was I hearingâ€| Herd speak to me? That was unreal. Animals did not talkâ€| Then again, were they also to become Kin. So confusing.

The brown furred one seemed to notice it and seemed to frown. "Oh, right, you don't recognize us."

I blinked again. Was I supposed to?

My thoughts became interrupted as four golden furred Herd jumped into view, pushing themselves and each other against each other in a big tangled ball of violence and laughter. Two of them were exactly identical, while the other pair seemed to have slight differences but plenty of similarities. The two larger Herd stepped out of the way and let out sighs. I got the vague feeling that this happened often.

"Don't mind them, they've been like that since foreverâ€|" said the larger blonde.

I simply nodded, unsure of how to react to anything.

Then the two identical blondes broke from the tangle and stood in front of me, wild looks in their eyes and their jaws open to show teeth.

"Hey there!" one spoke.

"Nightmare!" said the other.

"You-"

"-remember-"

"us?"

The two spoke, completing each others sentences without skipping a beat, almost as if they had a lifetime's worth of practice at perfecting it. It reminded me of the way some Zipplebacks spoke, with each head acting perfectly in sync with the other. Almost as alarming was the fact that they knew what I truly was. How?

"Whoâ€|" I began to speak for the first time. My voice sounded soâ€| squeaky, almost like one of those Terrible Terrors with their tiny voices. This was so humiliating. But I continued to speak anyways, after all, these Herd couldn't have been people I knew.

The two identical blondes and the brown furred one shown their teeth, but I think the brown furred one was being nervous about it.

The brown furred one gave what reminded me of a grimace. "Uhâ€|" it seemed to struggle finding the words. "Nightmareâ€| we served under Flight Commander One-Eye, your grandfather."

My eyes opened wide and I suddenly found myself falling to my rear as the sudden realization hit me. No, it couldn't be them were they? I mean, it was bad enough that my own brother decided to partake in this stupidity, but to think that some of the other Squires under my departed grandfather would stoop so low, that was unthinkable.

The larger Herd approached me and I backed away, hissing. "Whoâ€| which are you?" I said. I wanted answers, solutions. Or at the very least, awareness of who exactly I was dealing with. I couldn't trust total strangers and just as well, I might as well know who the traitors were.

The brown furred Herd gave an answer, its voice all sorts of nervous. It had right to be. "I was the Gronckle, you know, the bardâ€|"

I tried to recall that. Yes, that bard. She was considered lucky to be a Squire, having gained the prestige and connections midway into her training in a different field. Our King let her join anyways, I think as a way to show that even those devoted to remembering the part could prove to be fierce warriorsâ€| "And youâ€| did this by way of thanks?"

The former Gronckle backed away. She was ashamed, as she should be.

The expressions of the two identical blonde furred ones soured, realizing I was not in a good mood. Oh, I was just getting started.

"And I know who you are!" I said, looking back at them. I mean, the answer was so obvious. If it looks and talks like a Zippleback, it should be one, even if it was in the form of Herd.

The two males gave me nervous looks. Of course. They knew my beef with them already. Oh, such wastes, almost as bad as my brother for they were almost as lazy. They hardly deserved the Squiredom and more worthy aspirants should have received their slot. I knew they goofed

up so much, hardly really training and pulling all sorts of tricks on other Kin. I bet they sided with the Herd at the first sight of rain.

"Hey! Leave them alone!" said one of the other two smaller blonde Herd, the one with the longer fur. They stopped fighting, clearly displeased with my actions. That was fine by me, that feeling was mutual!

"Yeah, if there's anyone that's gonna pick on 'em, it's gonna be us!" said the shorter furred counterpart.

The Zippleback, well, the pieces of one, both turned nervous looks as their companions. "Now might not be-

"-a good time!"

I snorted. I don't know who they are. Were they some other disgraced Squire that found life among the feeble?

The two Herd stepped forward, putting up their paws in what I assumed to be some sort of offensive gesture. I was fine with fighting them, I mean, how much harder it was going to be?

But before we could come to blows the large blonde one stepped in. "We don't want to start any trouble!" it said, its voice breaking with nervousness.

"She started it!"

"Yeah, for once my brother's right!"

"Hey!"

"Maybe, but well, she's been through a rough time, haven't you?" said the large one.

"Of course I have." I smirked. I had to give this large Herd some credit. At least it knew how to properly treat me. I think I knew of what to take advantage of. Now if only today could stop from being one rude awakening after another.

"Yeah," said the large Herd. His face was red for some reason, almost like the blood in his body was gathering up there. Was that a Herd thing?"So, uh, let me just say that I'm sorry for what I did last night..."

I blinked. "Wait, what did you do?" I mean, I was flattered, but what was so important this Herd chose to apologize to me when we first met?

The large Herd seemed to grow even more red so much so that that traitorous Gronckle seemed to grow concerned. "You don't have to say it, you know," she commented.

"I kind of have ta," said the Herd. It then turned to face me. "Aboutâ€¦ well, you probably wouldn't have crashed if it wasn't for meâ€¦"

My eyes immediately went wide as I suddenly remembered this Herd's

face. It was him! That stupid Herd thatâ€¦ plowed through me and about a dozen other Kin as if we were a light breeze. I saw it last night thinking it was an easy way to earn some notoriety by besting a foe that took down so many commoners so easily, but I knew I bit off more than I could chew when a single hit ended up knocking me out. And that was when I was a nearly full-ground Nightmare, at least a dozen of times its size as a weakling Herd, I had no chance against that monster!

I shoved my way through going under group of Herd. I was not going to be in the same room as what might have been some sort of warrior prodigy. Not if I wanted to live at any rate.

I dashed through them, moving scurrying on all fours. My body ached and hurt from all of that awkward motion, but fear propelled me past all that and I went off. The juvenile Herd and those traitors didn't seem to follow and that was good, but a little sooner I realized in doing so, I might have set myself up for an even bigger fall.

There were Herd all over the place, all wandering every pathway and nook and cranny between their nests, all of them licking their wounds and restoring their nests into working order. And the vast majority of them seemed to be bigger and more savage than the group I left. They all noticed me, giving my odd and suspicious looks. Oh, I hope they don't realize what I really am and gut me while I am so vulnerable.

Oh, this was bad, I needed to escape somehow. There were no Kin in the sky, the battle having long since concluded. It was not my Kin's way to leave long lasting sieges and assaults, not when a quick and destructive raid was what was needed.

And then I saw something that caught my attention and my heart raced. I approached a pair of Nadders, a group of which somehow managed to avoid to detection from the nearby Herd. No one seemed to notice them as they drank from a nearby pool of water that was gathered in some sort of woodenâ€¦ thing. It was ideal. All I had to do was ask them to take me back to our King!

I approached them, scurrying to their feet. My Kin did not notice me, simply too preoccupied with quenching their thirst. I didn't wait, I had something important that needed doing. "My Kin, I need you."

The two Nadders pulled their heads from the water and eyed me, their heads tilted in a slight daze.

I grinned. These commoners still could follow their betters. "Good, as soon as you are able I need you toâ€¦"

My Kin snarled at me, letting out ferocious cries. What happened? I was asking for their aid!

I scurried behind the nearest piece of cover, not wanting to get caught up in whatever it was that caused my Kin to be so slighted. Once I was safely away, I poked my head out, my fear having only just barely beaten out by my curiosity.

The Nadders grimaced, turning their heads back at their drinks. One let out a sigh. "Stupid Herd. They won't stop bothering us."

"I'm sure it'll be fine," said the other.

The first Nadder scowled at his peer. "Not with our new Flight Commander."

"Maybe notâ€¦" admitted the other.

I ducked my head down once my curiosity was sated. There was a new Flight Commander? Here? Andâ€¦ why was it that my Kin were so hostile? I raised my paws and had my answer. It was so unfair. My Kin did not recognize me unless they were all privy to this madness! The rest simply treat me as they saw me, a beast. And I was so small andâ€¦ fragile. It was like the worst parts of being a hatchling but without the Breath or the wings to run or defend myself.

I then suddenly jerked from my hiding spot and then collapsed to the ground. Something touched my shoulders and in that startled moment, I reacted with a jolt. I found myself on the floor, face up, looking at my attacker with a fearful jolt. And then I glared at him, my reflexive fear vanishing replaced by rage. "Brother!" I shouted. Oh, I was so angry at him. My brother was in that Herd body I saw the other night, that shameful guise that denied who he truly was. "Sister, don't make a scene. People are looking." He sounded worried.

I turned my head around, looking at all the other Herd that took notice of us. I glared back at him. Brother might have been worried about theseâ€¦ beings around us, but I didn't care one bit about those animals. Besides, I couldn't get any lower if I tried. I was pitiful. "Justâ€¦ leave me be. This was all your fault anyways!"

"No it wasn't!" another voice said, a somewhat shorter, yet brawnier Herd youth came from behind my brother. "It was me, not Hookfang that did wellâ€¦" It was my brother's Liege, the one that he served and so willinglyâ€¦ forsaken himself for. When I met him, I thought he was simply a cut above a normal Nightmare, strong, bold, and a bunch of other things, but now I truly saw him for what he really was. At least he had the decency to take the blame for bestowing thisâ€¦ curse on me.

Then he should be the one to undo it. I just rolled my eyes. "Fine, I don't care who did it; I just want it undone."

Several of the other Herd noticed our conversation, it wasn't like I was trying to hide. Anyways.

My brother and his Liege seemed to grow nervous however. "Now might not be the best time for itâ€¦" said my brother.

"Yeahâ€¦" said his Liege. "Astrid's got enough problem as isâ€¦"

I sighed. "Then _when _is a good time for you to undo this?"

They both threw their paws up in the air in some sort of weird Herd gesture. "We don't know," said my brother.

I glared. Really, was I going to be forced to stay in this weak and humiliating form for any longer? They forced me into this and now they were insisting that I remain suffering a while longer? Gah! I hope undoing this curse was as simple as removing these strange furs

I was covered in.

"Honest!" declared my brother.

My scowl darkened. He was just as useless as he always was, wasn't he?

"I'm sorry," he said again. "But come on Sister, you're gonna have toâ€¦ adjust."

I almost felt like tearing my brother's head off for that. I had no intention of adopting Herd mannerisms for what I was determined to make a temporary state of affairs. As soon as I was in my true form again, what use would I have of walking like one of the Herd? Why should I just surrender my heritage?

My brother backed away, paws raised. "Okay, look, Sister, people are looking."

I shown my teeth and scowled at the Herd that surrounded me. Again, I wondered why I should care? "And that is important how?"

"Becauseâ€¦Uh..." he struggled to think of something. I smirked. He was probably going to come up with nothing. "Because, um, think about your reputation..." Okay, so maybe I was wrong this one time.

But that didn't change my feelings one bit. "What reputation?" I sneered. They didn't know me for one and secondly, these animals were beneath me and my Kin. Why should they matter?

"Because right now, you're looking all sorts of crazyâ€¦" he said.

I turned my head and glanced at the Herd around us. Each of them had their faces looked in a strange expression that a part of me wondered if maybe brother had a point. They all stood there silently judging me. While I was quite sure I was their superior, were the Herd going to believe that when all they saw was this weak body? It was one thing for my Peers and Kin to think of me as lesser; we were all beneath our Lord after all and he was the one who really made the judgements of worth. But to have the Herd consider me beneath them was something I despised; they should _know_ I am above them.

As I thought and weighed my options my brother's Liege stepped forward and placed his paw just within spitting distance of my face. "Here, let me help you up?"

I looked at the paw, confused. What was I supposed to do with it? What did this gesture even mean?

My brother's liege seemed to be aware of my confusion. He bent down and brought his paw over to one of mine andâ€¦ closed it. His paw felt firm against mine. Really, was that how these paws were supposed to be used?

While that might have been handy information to know about, I really didn't want to have any part of whatever it was he was planning. "Hey!" I said and tried to pull my upper leg out from under his grip. It was no use though, the male was so much stronger than me. He smiled at me, giving me an awkward grin. He clearly knew that I

disliked him doing whatever he was doing, yet he did it anyways.

Then he stood back up, pulling me up along with him all against my will. He then let go of me and stepped back a few steps, letting me go just when I suddenly realized I needed his firm hand to keep me standing.

My knees caved inwards, hitting each other and I wobbled unsteadily as a frightened reflex surged through me. I stood standing, but my balance was so unstable, so unsure. I stood as the Herd did. I felt so weightless, like I could fall at just the slightest breeze if I didn't maintain my diligence. Yet, my back felt better in this new position, almost making up for the awkward feeling of falling I felt on my lower legs.

My brother's Liege then gave me an awkward little smile. "See, it's not so bad is it?"

I frowned. "It is as that bad!" I almost screamed or I would have if I didn't lock my face in a nervous grin. I wondered how long I was going to have to do this. I dared not move, not even my face.

The other Herd around us seemed to slowly lose interest in us, apparently having come up with their own conclusions, their own reasonings over what had transpired in front of them. Little by little, they left, having grown bored of the female stuck imitating a stone. I wonder how many of them would make the correct guess, realize what I was. Probably none. I mean, they had to have inferior abilities to my Kin.

My brother's Liege again approached me and grabbed my paw with his much stronger arms. He pulled me not up, but this time away.

I panicked with startled fear, but thankfully I was able to follow. I might not have realized it, but my lower legs seemed to know the right steps to keep myself moving forward. Now I just wished that my brother's Liege could slow down.

The male took me further a few more paces and stopped me by a large stone, probably the leftovers of last night's attack. He let go as we approached.

I took my first steps independent of anyone else, seeking the stone. I placed a paw on the stone and tried to push against it, using the large rock to act as a wall to stand up against. It worked and I had some balance, some stability. I let out a relieved sigh. "... Don't do that again."

My brother's Liege smiled. "Well, I won't need to."

Brother approached me again and I felt my fears vanish as something above mild irritation set in.

He said nothing, but I had some things I wanted to ask him. "Why are you called 'Hookfang'? Are you telling me you have a name?" I mean, I recall my brother being referred to such by his Liege and the others with him during that challenge I partook in, but I couldn't ask about that at the time. Now that I finally had some stability, some time, and I was being forced into accepting Herd things, I might as well

figure out something that's been bothering me.

Brother seemed to grow as red as that blood craven warrior earlier. Was that a human sign of aggression? He turned to his Liege, prompting me to do the same.

My brother's Liege simply raised his paws again. "He's got some really big teeth no matter what he is" and I needed to call him something."

"So you gave him a name?" I asked. I mean, last I checked, only my King had the right to bestow them.

He did that gesture again. "Everyone has a name."

I blinked a few times. Herd gave themselves names so easily? Were the standards so low? They clearly had no regard for the worth of a name setting apart those who were clearly tested and proven. I bet that if I asked them, they'd say that Herd birthing is wondrous enough to warrant naming.

"Which reminds me," said my brother. "We probably should call you something as well. I mean people are"

I audibly groaned. First they expect me to stand like a Herd, now they plan to name me as one as well. "If I must" I said. "I'll go pick one myself." I mean, normally the King would be the one to allow names, but fine, I will adopt a temporary moniker just so that my brother and his Liege did not come up with something stupid like Meatylegs or something. Maybe something evocative of my natural affinities, I was Kin and I quite enjoyed fire" "Maybe 'Firewyrn'?" I asked aloud.

Both of the males with me looked at each other, both of them were clearly bewildered by my brilliance.

"Are you sure about that?" my brother asked.

I glared. I mean, first this Herd walking and now he had the gall to question my choice of name? "And what's wrong with it?"

"It's a good name" said my brother's Liege. "But it might be problematic. I mean, it kinda does refer to dragons" alot?"

I rolled my eyes. Well of course it would refer to my Kin, if I was right about what he meant by "dragon" anyhow. "I still don't see how that's too bad."

My brother let out a groan. "Alright, fine," he said. "There's no point arguing over it"

His Liege sighed, having given up as well. "Okay, so, 'Firewrym' it is."

I smirked. So today might have been a bit of a rude awakening, but I think I managed to salvage a small victory over it. Besides, someone had to remind my brother and his Liege about the pecking order.

47. Chapter 47

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

"You're pulling out of the hunt!" I shouted, top of my lungs in rage and disbelief.

The Viking Chieftain before me was of a...smaller, but by no means worthless Tribe. I couldn't remember their name, but as the leader, he was beefy as an Ox. They had some talent and a good number of them were supposed to help me in the greatest chance of a life time. Supposed to. "After thisâ€¦ mess, I don't think my Tribe has what it takes to continue with our plans. We lost a good few men."

I took off my helmet and slammed it down against the table, hard enough to cause it to shake. "Come on! What about the glory? The fame?" I needed him to stay on board with my plans. I needed him.

He just hung his head in shame. Rightfully so give the words that came out of his mouth next. "I think I had enough of that..."

I cursed underneath my breath. So he lost a few dozen men. It's not like he had his entire village when he was here. "Fine. Go do whatever!" I threw up my hands all willy nilly.

Then the Chieftain left me to myself and my guards.

"Another oneâ€¦" I sighed and stood from my seat, rage burning beneath my skin. I felt like getting something, something big. Maybe a man or a dragon. This was not working out as I hoped. Up until last night, I thought had everything set up for one big moment of glory that'd cement my place in Valhalla for life. Even with that wisecrack of an old man telling me about how he was using me to further his own ends, I was even willing to let that wimp Hiccup to do whatever it was he wanted; I didn't care if he was some sort of dragon-freak or whatever, he just gave me something that important enough to overlook everything.

At least, that's what I thought until half of the hunting party I called for was planning to skip out. My forces got attacked during a week of celebration and now everyone around me suddenly turning into cowards. People are certain turning into something, but not into dragons. Maybe I could fix that.

But first, I had to clean up that annoying rabble trying to beat their way in.

"Send the next one in!" I declared to the guards at the looked at each other with half dreaming looks in their eyes.

I gritted my teeth. Idiots. I wasn't afraid of an angry mob; my fury was greater than theirs of that I was sure. Figures I had to do everything myself. I shoved my guards out the way and pushed open the door.

I was bombarded by the shouts and the cries of the masses. Berzerker men that had second thoughts about my ascension, rival Chiefs and their lessers that felt entitled for being in my domain when it was attacked by an army of dragons, and worse. I pushed through the ranks

and grabbed the closest to me of that group and dragged him into my personal Hall. The door slammed behind him, leaving us free from the upstarts outside.

"Hm, finally." The Chief I pulled was older, as most of them were, but this one was an old timer, old enough to have his beard completely greyed out. He looked at me with a stern, almost holier-than-thou gaze.

My eyes rolled. I'd rather go back to polishing my sword than this, but I am no idiot. It's either manage revolts or don't manage at all. I learned that by witnessing it first hand after all and I very much liked being the leader, thank you. Now if only all of my problems could be solved by permanently removing my adversaries...

I took my seat at the front of my ruined dining table. The whole hall was ruined, with that hole in the roof and all, but I wasn't going to change up my habits just because someone was afraid the roof was going to cave in. No, anyone too cowardly to even do that wasn't even worth my time! The walls were looking cracked and there was rubble everywhere, but no, I am not that cowardly as to abandon my throne.

I sighed and turned back to my...guest. It wasn't even lunch yet. "Alright, what's the problem this time!" After the battle was over and the rest of the dragon retreated, I ended up having to sit through these meetings over what our plan of actions were and then I had to deal with every single person deeming that it was important that I see them first!

He stood taller than the previous man and young enough that he could have been my older brother. However, his hair was far too red, close enough to remind me of Father's favorite partner. "It's those accursed dragons!" He shouted. "And their leader!"

I groaned. This again! "Yeah! Yeah! I know!" I said absentmindedly. If he was going to bring up this stuff against me, well, I didn't care enough to answer it properly.

"But...but!" the Chieftain stuttered. "Those dragons are everywhere!" He raised his hands and swung it out in a violent gesture then came down hard with an axe toward the table.

I simply glowered looking at the weapon with utmost indifference. Really, the same old spiel that I've been every day since morning. I even bet he was going to go spout off something about a certain Night Fury now.

"And then we'd need to take care of that boy and stop him before he brings more dragons so he can take us out at his leisure!"

Yup, same old, same old. Gah! Why couldn't these men just get with the program and know that I was the one that called all the shots- It was like dealing with father yet again! Honestly, I could just gut dissenters here and now. Or maybe make things slightly more interesting by playing with my throwing knives. Bah, he wasn't going to be any fun. "I'm not killing them."

The Viking's eyes widened. "But, but!"

He probably was thinking I would have sided with him, but no, killing Hiccup wasn't on the table for me. "Oh, don't worry, I've got my own plans to deal with them." Especially since I'd like to have a few words with him about his brothers magic cloak and his being a Night Fury. I don't get what the others are so worried about by having people turning into dragons. I mean, come on, fire breath, flight, and more were there for the taking! What wasn't there to like?

"Butâ€¦" the Chieftain could only stutter like the fool he was. "You can't justâ€¦ let them get away scott free! You have to deal with them now!"

I rolled my eyes. He was wasting my time now. "Take him away!" I told my guards and then the two men by the door approached at my command. At least they were good for something.

The Viking Chief could only shake his head in apparent frustration. Yeah, that's right, it was me who dictated how things went. My guards escorted him out the door, leaving me and my men alone once again.

Still, the Chieftain did have a point. I had to deal with the â€¦ dragon problem. One way or another. "Fetch me Hiccup! I need him here now." I commanded my men. And then thinking about it added, "And hisâ€¦ girlfriend and his brother." They owed me a few things, explanations and whatnot.

My guards looked at each other, yet again with those blank and weary looks.

I growled and slowly moved my hand towards my dagger, making sure that those two buffoons could see it as I slowly pulled.

Reading the warning, they both nearly choked as their cringes blocked out their own windpipes. With a haste that was only reserved for the fear of death, they left and into the shouting throngs they went. My scowl remained and I stood from my seat. I took my helmet and looked at it, pretending the thing was in actuality a head, wondering if maybe this was the right choice.

I met Hiccup after the battle was over, once the stragglers have been rounded up and sent to the arenas. I'll admit, after seeing him partially change into a dragon earlier, I had to expect that he'd get even less human by the time I saw him next; I just never expected that he'd everâ€¦ make vassals, servants of the dragons. Yes, vassals, not petsâ€¦ how were dragons supposed to even understand honor to begin with? Well, technically, it was his girlfriend, but I knew enough to know that Hiccup basically ruled by proxy.

There was a bit of argument over how I was to deal with the dragons, about how it was expected of me to slay them then and there. Kill on sight, a rule I really think should apply to more than _just dragons. _But politics could be quite messy, especially when the said victim had a great many things I wanted: answers, power, glory. Hiccup had the key to them all and I was fully willing to accept a little bit of unrest if I could get those things. So, I let that "Flight" have the same rights as other guests, just to rub it in the faces of anyone who didn't like my rulings; I called the shots and I got what I wanted. The beasts were going to be ruled over by me.

However, I think now would be a perfect time for my guests to pay up.

The door opened and I saw more than what I was expecting. One of them was a Night Fury, Hiccup's dragon guise since he was unable, and right next to him were his little brother, that runt that somehow managed to be just a tad weaker than the wimp I already knew. But then there were two others, one was the Nadder that I was fairly might have been Hiccup's girlfriend; she was kind of getting more dragon like by the minute last time I saw her. Whereas for the other, I think that it was the so-called Stormfly, that Nadder I saw from early.

They were surrounded by angered Vikings and their Chiefs, receiving boos and screams as they went into the room. The door slammed shut as my two guards went in and sealed the door.

I turned to the newcomers, my eyes burning hot with questions and envy. I took my seat once again and contemplated what I was going to be bringing up first. Was it going to be the whole dragon loyalty business? Maybe I can get a kick out of stories about their mother? Or maybe I can get something I can take home? Okay I was already home, but still! "What was it you said about changing into a dragon not as easy as changing clothes again?"

Hiccup didn't answer me and instead turned to his brother with an almost stern look in his eyes. Heh, I wonder if that's going to put those two into conflict for a while.

The Nadder and the not currently a Nadder also turned their heads towards the boy.

Toothless could only shrug. "Sorry!"

I laughed. This was almost as good a skinning a cats. Who knew that one slip up would have let to such fun.

I saw Hiccup rolled his eyes. Strange how it was coming from a dragon, but hey, I can roll with Hiccup being some near mythical dragon that everyone wants a piece of so long as I ended up one as well.

"Well, I'm waiting."

The dragon stepped forward and sat near the table right next to me, batting a chair aside since he didn't need it to fit. He placed his paw onto the table and then golden light surged from the paw and then bright, shining runes emerged onto the wood of the table. 'TURNING BACK IS HARDER'.

I squinted at the dragon's eyes." And you said I might turn into a Terror! Your brother, the one guy even wimpier than you-"

"Hey!" shouted the boy in question.

"I mean it!" I said, honestly. I mean, why would I lie about something so true. "He's also a Night Fury. And last I checked, so was your Mom after all."

The dragon seemed to cringe at the mere mention. Heh, I guess it was a sore topic, not that I cared. Looking around, I could see everyone else was just as tense as him. I guess maybe had to do with the whole being chased by her thing from last night. That is probably the only thing that made sense out of the whole mess, I mean, my Mom used to chase me around a lot while she was still here.

"I mean, so maybe I won't turn into a Skrill, but hey, a Night Fury is almost as close. Lightning _and death_ as opposed to just having more lightning!"

The Night Fury tapped the table and then the runes changed shape. 'WE CANNOT BE SURE,' he wrote.

I glowered at him and slammed my fist into the table, causing it to shake. "And why not? Why do you get to be Night Furies and I can't?"

'IT IS INHERITED. BLOOD INHERITANCE,' the letters changed.

That actually explained it well enough. I mean, there were three Night Furies that I knew of and all of them were apparently just Vikings from the same family, I mean, I guess if being a dragon was somehow inheritable, maybe just descendants would be the same kind of dragon. Which suited my purposes just fine. "Alright, so maybe I can't be a Night Fury after all, but come on Hiccup, Skrills are part of my legacy! You've seen our symbols and emblems, Berserkers are tied to Skrills! And I've heard some of my ancestors used to control 'em!" Maybe it was the stories my parents and grandparents raised me on, but I've admittedly always had a thing for Skrills, the power of the heavens in something so small. Even after I've been forced to... grow up, a part of me still felt the appeal of that. Unlike my ancestors though, I'd channel that might directly.

The dragon looked at me for a moment, no doubt bashing in my shrewd thinking or puzzling out my immaculate logic. I almost let out a giggle when Hiccup refused to respond by writing something.

It came down to the peanut gallery to make up for him. "I don't think it works like that!" Hiccup's brother spoke.

I grunted, not caring about his dissent. "So?"

The Nadder tried to say something, but all that came out were dragon skrees and cries. The human, well, the _actual_ Nadder moved her hand over to the beast and then patted her on the back, letting out a reminder that understanding her was impossible.

Well, at least someone was doing my job for me. "We'll get to you and your issues later, because right now I actually want something that _matters_! Now just I don't know give me one of those fancy cloaks of yours!"

Hiccup wrote something. 'WE CANNOT MAKE A NEW ONE. WE DO NOT KNOW HOW. AND TOOTHLESS'S ONLY WORKS FOR HIM'

I glowered. Always something wrong. They can't make another and the one they do have apparently doesn't work for others, so I guess I can't use it, I had to take other options. "Alright, you didn't need a cloak to turn into a dragon, I'll have what you had!"

'ASTRID AND I CANNOT _STOP_ BEING DRAGONS,' came the text, extra emphasis quite clear.

Hm, I thought about that. Hiccup warned me about the drawbacks of the methods he used a while back and for the most part, I was thinking maybe it wouldn't be so bad to risk turning into a dragon. At least I'd have the power to strike down my enemies and I'd certainly use my brilliant mind to take full advantage of my newfound might better than any beast could. Sure I wouldn't be able to coordinate my Tribe as well with only making animal noises, but there were ways around it. I stood to gain so much. I mean look at Hiccup, from a scrawny boy that could barely lift a sack of wheat to a creature that could probably fight off whole formations by himself - I heard about what happened on Meathead Island. Normally, I wouldn't even consider the whole turn into a dragon thing, especially not after the things those beasts have done to me. But I can't deny it, by default dragons were better armed and stronger than a man had any right to be. If I was going to make a point, to crush them under my boots so thoroughly, to hold dominion over them in the most direct and unquestioned manner, this was the way to do it. I know it's a major compromise given my history with the beasts, but the results would be tremendous.

I sighed. "Fine, not the best plan right now." If only the drawbacks weren't so high; maybe it would be worth it. On the other hand, I didn't exactly need Hiccup to make me a dragon and besides there were other weapons I could get. I turned to the boy at the back of the room. "So why don't you give me those bolts of yours? I mean, I favor the crossbow myself, too."

That wimp looked at me funny, eye raised and finger pointed at himself. "You mean the exploding ones?"

I smiled. "Well, duh!" If I couldn't be a dragon and strike my foes down with my own breath, I could just as well load up a weapon that struck with the explosive force of several Night Furies. It's been at the back of my mind, but between the feasting and the big hunt, I haven't had the chance to bring it up. "I want a few of them for myself."

"Uh, sure!" Toothless stepped forward and approached his expression uncertain.

Hiccup said something to him, unintelligible to my ears, but I had an idea.

Toothless rolled his eyes. "Relax, it's only a small handful."

The Night Fury seemed to growl something back, a snide comment no doubt.

Heh, I knew it. Hiccup was always the sort to deny me things, probably because he knew the first thing that always approached my mind when I got a new toy. "Yeah, I'm sure you'll live!" I then reached out and patted the Night Fury's shoulder, a simple friendly gesture. I mean, I was still going to try shooting him with those bolts, but it's not like I should be respectful.

Hiccup placed his paw onto the table again, writing a simple

statement. 'I AM NOT BALDUR.'

I smiled, looking forward at the chance to testing my aim. I know Hiccup wasn't going to deny me that childhood pastime of ours, all those little games we played. Baldur was the Norse god that everyone else tried to wound, but everyone failed to do so. Stories say he was just straight up invulnerable, able to bounce back from anything and that it was impossible for him to die. While admittedly Hiccup probably can't be buried under a mountain, I think a few explosions won't cause any lasting damage; I know what Alvin can do and I know Hiccup wasn't far off from him. It'd be like when we were kids, except I don't have to worry about holding back.

Still, score was looking like one to one. I wasn't getting the power to turn into a dragon any time soon, I at least had a new weapon that'd change things. I was going to get a big jump in power after this.

I sighed. Unfortunately, all of the good stuff was taken care; I had to deal with the loose ends. "Fine, so about your dragons."

Astrid, the Nadder, stepped forward.

Hiccup wrote, 'YOU MEAN HER DRAGONS.'

I stuck out my tongue in disgust. Technicalities. "Yeah, whatever. Her dragons." I sighed. "So, I've decided that they can stay." And anyone who tells me otherwise gets thrown into a dungeon and strapped into a torture wheel while I go get my blind fold.

Both of the dragons looked rather surprised. The Nadder spoke something and I didn't need to speak dragon to know her say. "What? Really?" or something to that effect.

I nodded, slapping the table with a thud. "Yeah, so long as you pitch in for the big hunt I've been promised." It's a simple plan really. Many of my scheduled hunters are pulling out simply because they've taken losses during my feast. So, since Hiccup oh so wonderfully got himself a new army, I figured that well, that solved my manpower problem. Even if they were dragons, I think being able to exploit them made up for any downsides.

Both of the dragons however did not seem to agree, their heads bowing down low, their eyes sharp.

I glared at them. What was their problem? They were just beasts; sure I guess those two might have had some sympathy for the poor creatures, but come on, did we really care all that much about livestock?

'WE SHOULD CALL OFF THE HUNT,' wrote Hiccup.

"What!?" I shouted. I had spent a good deal of time, resources, and reputation preparing for what might be the greatest battle of my life and then the guy who said I should begin it decides that I should pull back at the last moment? What was this?

Astrid screed something loud enough to cover my ears.

"Hey, stop that!" I waved. Well, she did have a habit of beating me

up when I was a kid, only reason she got away with that was because I never dared let anyone know she did in the first place. I guess something next change.

Hiccup spoke something to the Nadder and they seemed to have a minor conversation about something that's got them spooked.

Not liking that they were talking without me, I decided to slam both fists onto the table, causing a shockwave that forced the others to turn to look at me. "Justâ€¦ just tell me what's the problem you're so worried about. Geez!"

Hiccup touched the wooden table again causing the golden letters to reappear in a flash. 'IT IS NOT A GOOD IDEA.'

My eyes narrowed. "And why not? Why can't we hunt the Red Death" And it better be a good reason. I want to fill the gaps made by the deserters with some disposable shock troops.

"Becauseâ€¦ Mom and Dad will defend him."

I turned my head towards the younger brother, Toothless, looking him right in the eye. Yeah, I guess that makes some sort of sense. That old man said that the Chief was being twisted into a monster, which I saw last night, and well, I already knew about the Mom thing. I sighed. "So this must be the part where you tell me that you _don't _want to kill your parents?"

The dragon and his brother both rolled their eyes. Yeah, the family resemblance was almost creepy.

"Hey. It's not my fault you guys never think to overthrow your parents!" Seriously, succession law was plainly clear. Agnatic Primogeniture - Eldest male inherits father's titles and land on death, banishment, or otherwise being unfit to rule. If lacking male descendants, go for uncles. It was an ideal system for me because it meant I could directly inherit once my father was off the throne, especially since the only other person was by default invalid to inherit. I just simply sped up the process by a lot. I shook my head. "So, you're not going to go through this plan because you're afraid of hurting your parents?"

Both nodded.

I then turned to the Nadder. "And you're not gonna help me out either because they're not doing it?"

The Nadder nodded.

I sighed. What wimps! I felt a rumbling going on through my throat. I felt ripped off, having been fed some stupid lies and then told exactly how I was deceived. I was promised something! "Gah!" I threw my helmet on the floor. So unfair! "So you plan on facing the Red Death alone? To go and face a monster and whatever forces it has without the support of at least some allies?" I knew from last night that dragon was partially responsible, at least, that's what I've been told.

They clearly knew my point. I could see in their eyes.

"It's not a good idea" said Toothless.

Hiccup placed his hand on the table again, writing in one last line.
'THE RED DEATH IS POWERFUL AND HE WOULD-'

I didn't let him finish. I already knew about that dragon's so called power; we've talked about it a bunch of times. And I've decided I wasn't going to be swayed and bow down to fear, not when things greater than that were at stake.

I looked at my so-called guests, a fury in my eyes. I wanted power, power enough to strike at my foes, especially dragons. They gave me a chance and now they took it away. They decided to spit in my face with their refusal to help me at the task they gave me! My hands reached for the blade that I kept at my waist and I howled in a fury.
"You better run!"

Hiccup and his so called friends didn't waste any time, they knew they were no longer welcome at my table. They hurriedly left me, heading out the door and into the still furious crowds. Well, they were perfectly calm in comparison to me! And they knew it. The throng of people thinned out once they saw my foul mood and listened to my unrivaled fury! Those weaklings knew better than to stay within my reach. Even my idiot guards knew I wanted to be alone.

I took my blade and struck my table. Wood splintered and cracked underneath my hand, the blade digging into the wood until it broke through the otherside. I felt like if I was any angrier I would have roasted everything around me. Sure, I got that runt Toothless's promise of a new weapon, but that was small compensation for missing out the my greatest achievement of all.

I placed my head onto the table, feeling defeated as the white hot rage burned out in a flash. Why was it that everyone was pulling out from such a momentous occasion? We could have had all that we could have wanted, well almost.

"Are you done yet?" I heard a voice speak close to me.

Anger returned to me in an instant. I didn't want anyone to see me while I was like this, not now. I tore my blade from the table and made a blind swing at the newcomer.

I heard the sound of steel clash, the attack being parried. "Hey! You don' see me takin' jabs at ya' do ya'?" It was that Bog Burglar girl, the one that looked almost eerily similar to Hiccup's girlfriend. She had a big grin on her face, the kind she wore when she wanted to be annoying.

I snorted. "Go away!" I then plopped my head down onto the table. I didn't want to deal with her.

"I think not," said Camicazi, with annoying cheer. "I've got business with ya!"

I turned my head to look at her. "Just go on, take something! I don't care!"

She laugh. "Well, thanks, but there's no fun in it if you don't care! Besides, I'm here for something else."

Curses. She wasn't doing what she always did and just stole things! Instead, I think she was coming here for my sanity. I contemplated swinging my sword at her a few times, but I decided against it. I knew I could probably beat her; she was just a girl after all. But I don't think I could do that before being driven insane by her incessant taunts. I decided against it; better do what she wants so I could get her to shut up. "What do you want?" I groaned.

She smiled. "Tell me, when was the last time you heard from Alvin?"

I raised my head off the table and narrowed my eyes. She wasn't here to bother me and annoy me like she did with everyone else. She was here for something major. "A few months ago. Why?"

"Oh, nothing, just trying to find out where he's been." Her grin only grew. "So, I take it you decided against his offer."

I snorted. "Well, of course not." The Outcasts even at their best were a small tribe with limited population growth, a single island to their name, and an industry that relied on getting most of their things from pillage. They had plenty of warriors, but that's all they had. The Berserkers were way above them in terms of power and prestige; there was no way I would even consider donating supplies and men to his cause, not when I was far too mighty to be swayed. Besides, anything I could have wanted from Alvin, Hiccup was the cause of anyways.

She laughed. "Well, then, I've got a little suggestion for ya'!"

I squinted at the girl, just trying to make sure if she was being serious. "What?"

"Since hunting the Red Death was a bust, would ya' reconsider just changing the target of your hunt? I mean, it's not the same thing, but it comes close."

My eyes opened wide, realization setting in. Yeah, it came close.

48. Chapter 48

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"Uh, are you really sure that was a smart move?" asked the Meathead Heir, his eyes full of all sorts of inquiring questions. "I mean, the hunt was your best chance for well—" He didn't want to say it, but we all know what he was trying to avoid.

I glowered at him. The reason was plainly obvious. "Because we have no choice."

My brother's face twisted into an uneasy grin. "No one is going to support it. Not after suffering the losses we had..." I relay that to Thuggory.

I sighed. We came here looking for a chance to draw in enough

manpower and forces to bring against my _former_ King, but we had failed in that. While the village was full of visitors from across the Acrhipeligo, most of them weren't all warriors. There were plenty who simply were caught in the crossfire and paid for it. While I don't have any idea of the full forces of the Vikings, I'm certain they could at least match the Red Death'sâ€| if they were to unite. Unfortunately, diplomacy failed. _We_ failed. Enough was lost in the gathering that many who promised to join us were forced to just cut our losses. I knew better than to face a foe without the backing to do soâ€| Mother taught me that.

Thuggory frowned. "Well, I'm sorry then. But hey, if you ever change your minds, I'll back you guys up."

I raised an eyebrow. "Isn't your father, like, not going to like that? I mean, he doesn't quite like me or my brother for that matter."

He shrugged. "He doesn't have to know does he? Besides, I kinda need to do something to make up for being taken out so easily to your Dadâ€| uh, well when I was younger I mean. "

And I thought I had a loose tongue. Hiccup and I cringed before Thuggory switched the subject to something else entirely. "YEAH. LET'S GO WITH THAT," Hiccup replied writing letters into the dirt.

Last night was a bit of a sore point, what with both of us getting near roasted by both of our parents. I don't understand it all, but I was determined to make the Red Death pay for setting us against each other. I was going to break whatever enchantments that held them.

"THUGGORY!" a voice boomed, just barely loud enough to be heard through the crowd.

"And speaking of dads," he turned towards the direction of where the sound came from. "I think that's my cue..."

I turned to Hiccup, wondering if he thought that it was fine for the boy to leave so soon. All he replied with was with a nod of his head. "Well, we'll come and visit once we're back home. It's only a short flight to your island after all."

Thuggory smiled, nervous yet at the same time filled with a strange energy. "Well, just don't let Dad know about it and we're golden. He's still kinda mad at me for backing you up last night!" And then he was off.

I turned to my brother. "Well, at least we have someone willing to back us," he said.

I frowned. "I still wish we would have gotten more back up. I mean, we could still get Dagur to help us, right? He has plenty of ships to throw around."

He shook his head. "On thinking on it some more, moreâ€|" he seemed to struggle for the right word for a second. It was very clearly one of those made up Dragonese/Draconic words Meatlug helped make. "Ships. More ships might end up hurting us."

I squinted my eyes at him, trying to grasp onto his reasoning. "You mean because of the terrain, right? All those jagged rocks and sea stacks on the way over?"

He seemed to give a shrug. Well, what passed for one for a Night Fury. "Yes, but not only because of that."

I frowned. "Because of what?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Forget I said anything."

I frowned, not really convinced and not really wanting to forget. I mean, if there was a good reason as to why he was thought a naval assault would be bad, why wasn't he telling me? But then again, I had enough on my plate to think about. "Sure, sure." I pretended to throw something behind me.

My brother smiled and pulled off a goofy grin with his all too round and toothless maw. "Okay, so, uh, I'll guess I'll help Astrid deal with herâ€| our new subjects, mind taking care of-"

I immediately denied him from finishing that sentence. "NO!" I spoke. "Hookfang's sisterâ€| Firewrym-" I used her new "name"- "is a big jerk."

My brother's grin grew wider. "And Stormfly wasn't?"

I had a funny feeling that I wasn't getting what he was implying. "What are you getting at?"

He shook his head. "Forget about that, too."

"Great, how soon are you going to be asking me to forget everything?"

He laughed. "Don't worry about it. Say, on the way home, maybe you'd like to come fly with me and Astrid? We do kind of need to lead her new Flight home."

I thought about that for a moment. I've been through plenty in the past few hours and have only gotten a few hours worth of sleep. I probably might nod off or crash into something. On top of that, I was going to be leading a bunch of dragons, a couple of whom probably knew me in my old life. I really didn't want too many reminders from way back when, not when that brought even more unfortunate question with even worse answers. On the other hand, it'd be the first time I've flown that didn't involve me fighting for my life. And then it'd be the first time me and my brother could really get together, equal in yet another way.

I frowned. Why did it have to be so complicated?

And then, as I thought, I felt my brother lick me on the checks. "Hey!" I snapped.

He smiled and then darted off into the crowds. "Make sure you deal with our new friend! Check to see if she's not causing any problems." And then I lost him.

I wiped the saliva off my face. Yuk. I don't mind the fact he licked me, it was more that his spit was going to take a whole lot of work to get out of the wash. I shook my head. Fine, I guess I might as well take care of her.

I turned my head onto the longship behind me, its crew loading whatever supplies and making the final preparations for the upcoming voyage ahead. The twins were harassing the loaders, but so far nothing seems to have fallen off into the sea yet. With Dagur's ceremony effectively over on count of party crashers, there was no longer any reason for us to stay here. In fact, it wasn't just us Hooligans that were leaving, pretty much every other Tribe was packing their ships with the intention to leave. It helped that a certain Night Fury wasn't ordered to destroy their ships like last time.

I climbed aboard our flagship and then set off. The sailors hefted boxes and barrels onboard, most of them probably full of dirty dirty laundry or the excess food and drink. Emphasis on drink, especially that disgusting stuff everyone but me seems to like.

I nearly ended up getting flattened by a loose barrel, but I narrowly leapt over it. "Hey, watch it!" I snapped, but didn't turn my attention towards whoever made that mistake; I had much more important things to do.

Not caring to spend any more energy on the sailors, I moved below deck. There, I found I was not alone.

"Quit it!"

I ducked my head over just in time to miss a flying piece of fruit, an apple maybe?

"But come on!" whinnied another one voice. Barf's I think. If not, Belch. "Eat up!"

I bent down and picked up the discarded produce and turned my head towards the back of the hold. In it, I found my some of my friends and someone not so friendly.

"Take them away!" a voice whined. "I'm not eating that. That stuff's for herbivores which we Kin are not! Get me meat!" The self proclaimed Firewrym sat at the back of the hold, her face contorted into a mess of agitation. She wore simple, bright clothes that contrasted sharply against her dark hair. She seemed miserable and was determined to make sure that anyone else around her knew that.

Barf and Belch stood over our latest addition with a basket of assorted fruits over head. They fumbled through them as if to search for something. "But we don't have any!" complained one of them. I swear, sometimes I can't tell them apart.

"Hmph," she snorted. But then moved her gaze toward her stomach, as if aware of something. Probably hunger.

Snotlout stepped into view and took one of the apples. "Come on, it'll be good!" he begged, bending down on his knee to bring himself to eat level. He took a bite out of the fruit, making a loud crunch.

"See. Mmmm!"

Firewrym made a gagging noise. "No! I've already sunk down low enough as it is!" Figures she'd be too high and mighty for even something as simple as eating a simple apple.

Hookfang could only groan.

I stepped closer and tossed the apple right into the fruit basket. Easy at this distance; I don't miss easy. It landed on top of the fruit pile, forming the tip of a perfectly balanced pile.

The others looked at me with some mild surprise, but they weren't expecting I'd go check on them. I grinned. Excellent way to get their attention. "You better get used to it!" I snapped. "You're gonna be living among us for some time. Especially since you're honor bound to stay!"

Firewrym glared at me. "Hmph, only because of a stupid technicality!" she shouted and then gritted her teeth. "Stupid. Stupid. My actual Flight Commander should have kept the title instead of forfeiting it!"

I frowned, remembering the events from last night. Dad was her Flight Commander after all, but since Astrid claimed ownership of the Flight on count of the fact that a sizable chunk of its Knights having sworn fealty to her and the fact that father was forced into conceding, that left Firewrym with us, unfortunately. I'd much prefer she'd be sent back to the Red Death with a message, but well, Astrid apparently has plans for her.

I shook my head. "Well, tough luck! You better eat your greens!"

She growled, fairly intimidating now that her vocal cords no longer supported it. "Well some of us do not plan on turning back on our heritage so soon!"

"Mine is different from yours!" I snapped. In the back of my mind, I was aware that my brother sent me off to go make sure she caused problems. But I didn't care about that, not right now.

But that gave her an opening to snipe back at me. "Oh, of course. How could I forget? You're human!" she said the word as if it was a bitter poison. "You didn't truly belong among us!"

I snorted back. "Well, of course. Why would I want to be in the same group as you?"

"Because I could trace my lineage back far enough to great heroes and titanic Kin!" she said, as if something could be so impressive.

I was about to come up with a reply, countering that I actually saw a small portion my own ancestor's life, but I felt someone tugging on my shoulders.

"Uh, guysâ€|?" Hookfang said.

I sighed. "What? Can't you see I'm busy here?" I wanted to knock this girl down a few pegs. I hardly knew her during my time in the King's domain, but I certainly didn't like her from what little interaction

we got.

"Uhâ€|" Hookfang stuttered. I felt another hand grab onto my coat, this time Snotlout's.

I turned and found myself face to face with Stormfly. And by face to face, I mean, really up in my face! I backed in a sudden startled reflex, and nearly knocked myself back into the wall. "Yow! Warn someone next time you do that?"

"I had to get your attention somehow!" he snapped. Then she took an apple from Barf and Belch and attempted to give it to Firewrym.

"No! I already told the others I am not eating it!"

"But if you don't, the Flight Commander won't let you fly alongside the others on the way home. Now, do you want that?" Stormfly said in an even tone. She clearly held control of the situationâ€| but for some reason, she started to turn very, very red. Was that blushing?

Firewrym looked at the red haired girl and sighed. "Do I really have to?"

I smiled. And found myself enjoying the irony. "Looks like order to be a dragon again, at least for a little while, you're going to have to act a little more like a Herdâ€|"

Stormfly shot me a look but I kept my grin. So, I was a little vindictive. I'm not my brother.

Firewrym sighed and took the apple. "Why are you against me, too?"

Well, that was one problem solved. Everyone seemed to breathe a sigh of relief once she took her first bite. Her expression looked like she thought she was eating some foul poison, spitting out chunks and skin every now and again but I guess no one really wanted to force her into enjoying it so soon.

But I didn't have long to enjoy that small victory. Stormfly stepped away as soon as the former Nightmare was two or three bites in, taking me along for the ride.

"Hey!" I quipped as she took me to the other side of the room.

"Mind if I have a word?" She asked. Her face still seemed to glow a little red, but it wasn't as bright as it was before.

"Uh sure," I answered, not really sure of what to say. I mean, just what there was to talk about? I guess maybe about Firewrym's hatred of fresh fruit? "Uh, is Astrid really not going to let her fly if she doesn't eat an apple or two?" I mean, I'd not let her out of dragon form at all, on count of the fact she still hasn't figured out her stupid amulet let keeps her trapped; I didn't want her knowing of that so soon, but then again, I am not her boss.

"Noâ€|" she replied in whisper. "She's letting her out, as unwise as I think it is."

"So that was a lie?" I shook my head. "Hiccup is so going to make you pay for that..."

"Yeah, yeah," she droned.

"But that's not what you want to talk about."

"No, of course not." She sat down and patted the wooden floor next time, prompting me to sit.

I did so. "So, then what?"

"I'm wondering how you're holding up, after well..." she struggled to find the right way to put it.

But there wasn't. I hated last night, everything about it. I fought both my Mom and Dad and I was on the defensive the whole night. I wanted to cure them, to break the King's hold over them, but I failed in doing that. The Red Death won without having to get involved directly. I was simply too powerless to stand up to him, even after all of my hard work! "I've been trying not to dwell on it." I shook my head. "If only last night didn't happen, maybe things would be betterâ€¦" And then I could muster a whole army to destroy the Red Death.

"Maybe," she echoed. "Who caused it anyways?"

"Hiccup said it started because Mildew threatened himâ€¦" I muttered. I remembered my brother describing how he got shocked a bolt of lightning from that old man and how that somehow initiated the attack to commence. I have no idea how that worked, but I who was I to judge? Besides, I was fine with letting him take the blame for itâ€¦ in fact. I narrowed my eyes and turned to Stormfly. "Say, anyone know where he is?"

Stormfly shrugged. "No clue."

I sighed. "Well we better find him then."

Stormfly blinked a few times. "Wait, why?"

I grinned. "Because I plan to take him down."

* * *

><p>It's perfectly easy to ignore the nagging things at the back of my head if I had enough busy work to keep myself from thinking. Believe me, the headache brought up just trying to sort out what to do when a hundred dragons all suddenly start working for your girlfriend are infinitely less of a problem compared to thinking about all of the implications over what happened to my parents.<p>

Astrid surveyed her new charges, all numbering somewhere over a hundred, the survivors of last night's battle. They all lined up, as if waiting to be judged, one at a time. The majority of those dragons were already sworn to serve her, but this was just a formality to ensure their loyalties. Luckily for us, we could do this without any of the Vikings bothering us. There was kind of an unspoken invisible line separating the dragons from every other Viking near the

docks.

Astrid eyed one of the members of her Flight, performing a thorough investigation. The Gronckle in question stiffened her back as if her life depended on it and held her breath as tight.

"Will you serve me?" the Nadder said, breathing deep in the dragon's scent. "And cut off your ties to your former King?"

The dragon nodded her head vigorously, probably afraid of what saying no will bring. "Yes! Yes! I serve!"

Astrid gave a snort, seemingly unbelieving, but I felt I knew her better than that. It was a facade, an impression made so that onlookers would never think she was soft. "Then, I ask I will ask you a single question. It is your job to reply."

The Gronckle nodded again, this time a little less excited. "Yesâ€¦ ask it, my Lady."

Astrid eyed her. At each, Astrid gave each dragon all a quick sniff and a single question asking about their intentsâ€¦ and personal questions. "What do you like to do?"

The Gronckle winced a little, knowing what came afterwards with her answer. She thought long and hard about it. "I like toâ€¦ fly, no wait, swim? Sunbathing?"

"Enough." Astrid then turned to me. "Is that enough?"

"Should beâ€¦" I gave a short sigh. I wish the dragon spoke a little more, but we didn't have time to let her speak too long.

The Gronckle looked at me as if I held her life directly within my pawsâ€¦ or jaws. "Please, please, speak favorably of me!" she begged.

I thought for a moment. "Alright so, sunbathing. Okay, Hot Rock? Maybe not. Seastone?" I struggled to think up the right phrase.

The Gronckle held her breath again, waiting for me to decide.

And then I finally got it. It came to me in a flash. "Yeah, let's call you Seastone."

The Gronckle then let out a sigh relief. "Okayâ€¦ that's not too bad."

Astrid raised her wings in a shrug. "It'll have to do for now." She shook her head and then turned her gaze towards the next dragon and began the process again. "Now then, do you swear to serve me?"

The Gronckle simply stepped back and fell back into the line, her trail done. She didn't seem to upset by having a name forced upon her, but it was part of how Astrid and I wanted to manage the Flight. It was a simple statement, a way to directly sever the ties they had with their former ruler. Names were a status symbol supposed to be reserved for the truly elite, Astrid and I chose to brand the dragons the served under us with their own names, signifying that they were no longer the of the King's forcesâ€¦ now if only naming somewhere

over a hundred dragons was easier.

I sighed. I was kind of aware that we were forcing them against their own will to break a cultural norm, but I really didn't agree with the Red Death and honestly, I kind of felt that each dragon deserved to be more than just a dragon and besides, we needed to tell them all apart somehow, especially since Astrid wanted to take them home. Boy, if any of the others back home reverted back to being dragons, things were going to get really difficult. Especially since Astrid's dragons were already having problems coping with the fact they were in a Herd "nest" as guests. I mean, they're all really scared and worried that the humans would all turn and skin them alive at any moment. Okay, only some of them would, but there's protections stopping that! But still, there was going to be plenty of talking once we got back home. They're all aware about Astrid being formerly a human girl, they've seen her slowly morph back into a dragon this morning and I'm sure a couple of them remember the whole bit where the King turned her into a Nadder, but if Firewrym was an indicator of anything, plenty of them weren't ready to deal with that happening in reverse.

Offhandedly, I named a few more dragons, bestowing them names such as Little Rock, Big Tree, and one particularly unusual case, Jumping Pine Trees. My attention was divided, somewhat, trapped thinking all of these strange hypotheticals and possibilities.

Briefly, I wondered if maybe once if I ever restore myself to human form, maybe I should bestow upon the dragons their own amulets to change form with. I mean, really, we were more or less forcing them to join Berk as potentially temporary residents. Would it be the right thing to do to let them experience the "Herd" more directly? Then again, such a change would definately mark them different from other dragons in a way simple names would not.

After maybe another hour of going through dragons, bestowing each a unique name, we finally reached the end. Most of them were rather indifferent of their options and a few seemed to dislike the fact that I, even though I was the child of a Flight Commander, was really overstepping tradition. Well, if I followed tradition, I'd have to gut each of them and offer their hearts and blood on an altar yeah, there's a reason I am not so tradition bound!

With the dragons all newly christened, Astrid lined them up one last time and went through their names, sounding off in the order that they received them. As the final dragon spoke his name, Astrid gave her wings a single flap to signal attention. "Good, my Kin. And my name is" she stuttered for a second, as if momentarily forgetting.

I cringed. I know the King must have done something to her, though I have no idea what it was or what he intended to do with her? It must have something to do with that bargain she struck with him. "Astrid," I called out. Hopefully, I could remind her.

My girlfriend, the Nadder, shook her head a few times, as if escaping from a trance. "Uh, yes, that's me"

I nodded my head, trying not to appear too alarmed. Maybe once we got home and I could get Fishlegs to run a diagnosis, but not in front of a worried and uncertain bunch of dragons. I turned to face them,

giving a toothless grin. Hopefully, I didn't look too uncertain or too threatening for that matter. "And I am Hiccup. You might remember me shouting that out a few month ago.."

Several of the dragons turned their heads to each other and spoke amongst themselves in hushed tones. Yeah, they definitely knew who I was.

"Hiccup!" I heard a voice call out from behind. It was Fishlegs. "Ship's all loaded up and ready to pull out!" he shouted.

Astrid and I turned and saw the big guy coming right at us.

"Perfect!" I shouted back. And then I momentarily slapped myself for forgetting, right. I raised a paw and did an awkward waving motion. It's not like I could do much anything else given how awkward dragon limbs were, but I had to reply with something.

Fishlegs waved back, apparently getting it. "Uh, right!" He then turned his body back and went back to the docks.

"We better get going then," I turned to Astrid.

Astrid nodded and then turned back to her Flight. "Come on!" she barked.

We moved forward and onto the docks. Any humans between us and there quietly stepped out of our way. There were enough problems on everyone else's plates and causing a fight here was not going to make things any better. Which really offset how outnumbered we were.

As we approached the ship, several of the deckhands quickly put aside whatever they held in their hands and lined up to make a salute. Dragon or no, I was still acting Chief and I hoped I remained "acting". I bowed my head and tapped the plank right in front of me, forming in bright golden letters a simple phrase: 'THANK YOU.'

The sailors dropped their salute and then moved back to fixing up the sails.

"What are they doing?" I heard one of the dragons murmur from behind.

"Quiet!" snapped another. "Who cares what these Herd think?"

"Shut it, both of you!" Astrid barked, then turned to me. "So what now Hiccup?"

"Once they leave, we'll follow right behind them." That seemed to bother the dragons, who clearly didn't want to spend any more time around humans. I sighed. "Astrid, why don't you take care of them? I'll just see if my brother is ready."

Astrid nodded. "Don't worry, I'll beat our Kin into gear."

I cringed a little inside as I stepped aboard. While I get that there's no word for "dragon", every time Astrid used "our Kin", I couldn't help but feel a little bit bothered. I mean, she used that

even when we were able to speak Norse!

I climbed the boarding plank, well planks and hopped aboard the deck. As soon as I did, I saw Toothless accompanied by a few others climbing out from the hold. He waved at me, with our grandfather's cloak draped over his shoulders. Snotlout and Hookfang came right behind my brother and then after them, Stormfly arose. Lastly, Barf and Belch stood to the flanks of our newest addition. Thankfully, I could talk to all of them without having to write words into the wood.

The self proclaimed Firewrym stepped forward. "Am I free to go now?" she snapped. "I did what was asked of me!"

I blinked a second. We asked her to do something? I turned to Toothless, hoping to get an answer.

He cringed, which made me think he might have done something guilt worthy. Stormfly, who stood right next to him seemed to radiate an almost knowing smile, but I decided that maybe asking them here and now wasn't the right call. "Uh, sure," I said to the dark haired girl. "Barf, Belch, can you take care of her?"

The two hesitated for a moment but then decided to help her back down into the hold to change.

Both Hookfang and Snotlout cringe. "She's not going to wear those amulets again if she had the choice," muttered Hookfang.

"Yeah..." agreed Snotlout, left a little speechless.

"It's not her choice," said Stormfly.

I just rolled my eyes. Clearly, Firewrym was the victim of some sort of prank. Whatever, it didn't matter and I don't think she was harmed. "Where are the others?"

They all shrugged. Snotlout replied. "I think they're on another of the ships. Probably because the twins tried to saw something."

That was even more eyeball rolling. The twins up to their usual antics was not something I needed. "Okay, I guess so long as they're under control"

"Which they're not," said my brother.

"We should be fine." I then turned to Snotlout. "Snotlout, you think you can take care of the fleet while I'm off? Have Hookfang as your aide if you'd like."

He shrugged as if uncertain about that. "Uh...sure" he didn't seem so sure about that. It was odd. I would have expect my cousin jumping at the chance to lead a fleet at any other time. What happened? Also, why hasn't he turned into a Nightmare already? There were all these little cuts all over his face, none of them major but definately there. Why haven't they healed up already? Maybe a mystery for another time.

"But then who'll watch my sister?" asked Hookfang. "I mean, if I know her, she's going to cause problems."

"Stormfly will."

"Hey!" the Nadder snapped.

It was clearly her fault that Firewrym did something she didn't like. So, it was only fair she watched her, whatever it was. "Change yourself once she's out and about."

She sighed. "It was still worth it..."

Toothless seemed to have trouble restraining a laugh. "I warned you."

She stuck her tongue out and move below deck a little early.

"Okay, what was that about?" I questioned and then immediately decided not to delve too deeply. "Whatever. Hookfang, that good enough for you?"

The taller boy hesitated for a moment but then nodded his head. "It'll do."

Snotlout then took his companion by the shoulder and then went off to talk to the deckhands over his new appointment.

With the others out of the way, I turned to my brother, the last and most important thing on my mind. "Toothless, are you ready?"

He tapped his chest bringing attention to his cloak, a smile on his face. He seemed way more confident, energetic than he did earlier today. Wonder why? "You know, I've been waiting to do this for longer than you'd think, bud." And then, with a quick tug of his cowl, my brother changed.

In a split second, where there was once a boy now stood a dragon that considerably out massed him. I heard a few gasps and awestruck comments coming from nearby crew-mates, but that didn't much matter to me.

I thumped my tail against the wooden deck, feeling my heart race. The dragon that my brother had become stood bolder than my brother did, with a confidence that I was almost sure came from somewhere else. He almost seemed like a different person. Almost. He was always going to be my little brother.

I smiled. "So this is what you look like?" I said as I did a quick inspection of the other Night Fury.

Toothless laughed. "Funny how it all worked out. I saw you as a Night Fury a whole lot more than you did for me." And then struck a few poses as if he was willing to show off his body, something I honestly never really saw my brother doing before now.

I laughed in reply. It was kind of funny really. I was born just a slightly unusual boy whereas Toothless was the dragon, yet despite that, we've learned and got to know each other in completely different spaces. I was slightly taller than my brother, but the difference can't have been more than a few inches. In compensation, his muscles were slightly firmer, giving off the impression he was

stronger. His snout was alsoâ€¦ flatter, again not by too much. Wings were about the same, but I'm certain his tail was just a bit thicker. The differences between us were so subtle, I needed to try and notice them. Still, it was enough. I turned back to Toothless. "Hm, you look strong."

"Of course I am," he said in a cocky tone.

It's strange how subtly different my brother was as a Night Fury, but then again, he did lose so much of his capabilities by becoming my little brother. Toothless was confident not because he was a dragon, but because he was in the body he was born with and knew what to do with. I grinned. It changes nothing. "But I bet, I'm faster."

Toothless's smile faded replaced by a hard stare. "You wish!" He then took off into the air.

I laughed and then unfurled my wings, planning to chase after him to prove him wrong. But then as I did, I caught a glimpse of Fort Sinister and promptly forgot everything else.

In the distance, I could see the Fortress was trashed. A good chunk of the walls and siege towers were reduced to nothing but rubble. The village was burned out, again, I'm not sure how it compared to the last time when dragons attacked, but it was a scene I didn't quite like. Faintly, I imagined the dragons were still over head and the battle still ragedâ€¦ Mom and Dad leading them.

I was hopeless to fight against my parents. Both of them possessed considerable physical prowess complemented by a powerful magical ability bestowed by the King. Astrid might have been a Flight Commander, but that was only by title. She lacked the power needed to challenge my parentsâ€¦ and the only magic I had let me go without a pen wherever I went. How was I supposed to challenge the King even with an army behind my back? He was above my parents the same way my parents were above me!

"Hiccup!" I heard my brother call out.

I escaped that mental prison I found myself in and then turned my gaze skyward.

"Are you too scared?" Toothless called, hovering over me.

I narrowed my eyes. "Not on your life!" I then took off.

I knew I couldn't challenge the King, not yet. But my little brother wasn't going to beat me!

49. Chapter 49

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

It has been so long since I flown for a reason other than to fight or run. I had truly forgotten what it felt like to have the wind beneath my wings, to have them filled with an energy that came not from rage nor from terror. I never really known how much I missed being a

dragon, not until I had spent several hours up in the air above the sea.

My wings were locked in place, my back muscles held firm to keep the invisible cushions of wind running beneath them. A few months ago, I would have found this all boring, tedious, and ultimately just something I had to suffer through in order to get to where the real action started. But here, right now, it felt like I was _truly_ flying again for the first time. And the best part, I wasn't alone.

I turned my gaze towards the dragon upon my right. Hiccup flew beside me, the opposite end of the formation formation. Astrid was ahead, flying directly overhead our flagship as we headed home. My brother and I flew so that our wing trips aligned with Astrid's and the dragons behind us did the same for us. Other small groups, wings, did the same, though there weren't enough longboats for each grouping to follow. V-formations were a simple, yet necessary practice designed to cut down on air turbulence and wind resistance; every dragon knew it.

But I couldn't help but feel like ruining it just then and there. I veered off course and slowly approached my brother. He didn't notice me, too busy, probably with his head in the cloudsâ€¦ the imaginary ones, not the actual ones that we were already flying through to begin with. Regardless, he was distracted and thus didn't have time to notice me as I lightly tapped his side with my paw.

Hiccup blinked in startled surprise a few times, letting out a gasp as he was stirred from his thoughts.

I pushed him off course even more and knocked him a foot out of sync. He looked at me, his gaze switching from confusion to an irritated look. "Toothless? What was that for?"

I twisted my face into a grin. "Oh, nothing, just wondering if you know where we were."

Hiccup looked at my funny. "Uh, what? Toothless, we've been flying forâ€¦ I don't know how long over open ocean. The sun's way past midday and nearly falling. I have no idea where we are!"

I let out a small chuckle. "You don't? Really? Would have thought you'd know!" These days, I've become used to my brother being the more knowledgeable of the two of us; but every now and again, there was just something, something mostly unimportant, that he was clueless on.

"There's no landmarks!" he spat. He clearly a little agitated.

"Seamarks!" I corrected him.

"Knock it off you, two!" Astrid shouted, turning her head back at us while her wings were still locked in place. "You're setting a bad example to our Kin!"

"Hey, they're not myâ€¦ subordinates. I'm not even a Knight!" And proud that I wasn't. Though I guess I have a similar rank since my brother dated her and that sort of thing does apparently tend to land

one in important positionsâ€¦ Besides, they were only commoners, what did they matter?

I saw Astrid shake her head, also annoyed.

Hiccup sighed as he drifted back right into formation. "Toothless, what's gotten into you?"

Several hours of flying, yet not being rendered sick of it, that's what! I had energy burn and I had the perfect plan to get rid of it all so that the temptation wouldn't bother me later tonight. "Oh, nothing," I half lied, though I bet that it was plainly obvious that's what it was. "I just remember where we were."

"Youâ€¦ know where we are?" Hiccup looked at me skeptically.

My grin sharpened. "Well, I am good at reading things, paying attention to the sky to learn where we were.," I decided to brag a little. I mean, how often do I get to exclaim about my good navigation skills? Almost never, that's what. My speciality might have been using the stars, but sometimes, like right now, the sun worked just as good. Though, I decided to play it will a little false humility. "But I also have very good eyesight!" And by that I mean boast about a different trait.

Astrid and my brother looked at each other in a mild daze, not getting what I meant.

I laughed a little more, but decided that before they really got mad at me, I might as well hand them the answer. "I'd look ahead, very, very closely if I were you!"

Hiccup and Astrid looked at me, then at each other, before deciding to finally listen to me. For a few second, they said nothing, their gazes locked at the horizon ahead of us. But then they eventually got it. At the very edge of our vision, already far better than most sailors even with the assistance of a spyglass, was the little dot of an island, one I think they'd recognize.

Astrid, whose eyes were better suited to the day, was the first to get what I was talking about. "Wait, is that-"

I didn't let her finish.. "Yup. We're home!" I then jettied forward and left the formation, leaving the two of them in my wake.

"Toothless!" my brother called.

I turned my head back for a half second, just to see the look on his face. Oh, it felt good to mess with my brother. "Catch me if you can!" I shouted. And then I dove ahead.

"Hiccup!" I heard Astrid call out, her voice growing faint as I distanced myself.

"Sorry, Astrid!" I heard my brother apologize. His voice felt more solid, still faint, but no where near as far away.

I turned my head to catch a glimpse of it all. My brother, the only other Night Fury my age I ever met, followed after me, gaining speed.

I smiled, he took the bait. Earlier we had a short little "race" back before we left, but that ended up being cut short with Astrid having us fall into formation a few minutes after we started. Now, I finally had the chance to finish what I started.

"Meet you at the docks!" I yelled and drove more power into my wings.

"Toothless! Get back here!" my brother cried. He ramped up his speed to come at, just exactly what I wanted.

"You're gonna have to catch me!" I yelled. I flapped my wings even harder, pushing myself ever closer to my limits. I felt like I could go even high if I wanted.

My brother meanwhile didn't waste time replying again. He went after me, giving me his all. I gave mine in turn.

The island ahead, our home rapidly grew in size as we neared, turning from a small dot into Berk proper. Our little chase drove us ever closer with each of us gaining speed until I was able to make out the details on every ship's sails. My wings felt like they were burning up, my lungs never felt this tense, yet I felt alive, powerful and nearly unrivaled in my abilities. Nearly.

My brother kept coming, in much the same state I was in, exhausted yet still strong. He was the only one who could really be my equal and he lived up to it.

"Night Furies!" I heard the Vikings shout. "Two of 'em!" But they didn't concern me. I had bigger things to worry about.

I scanned ahead, noting that the nearest pier was soon going to be within reach. It was the perfect end goal. I turned back to my brother and smiled one last time. "See you at the bottom!" Before he could reply or react, I narrowed my wings and then made the dive. And just as I wanted, my brother followed me, copying my actions and performing a deep swoop.

The end of the chase was upon us and I was certain I held victory in my paws. My brother might have been the smarter and more diplomatic one, but I certainly held every physical advantage. I was going to win.

And then I felt something grab onto my tail, something big and meaty. It was throwing me off balance.

I brought my chin close to my neck and saw my brother's face, shaped in an odd satisfied look, holding something between my two paws. "Gotcha!" he declared.

I blinked. How did he get to me so soon? I was sure I had a head start! Well, I had to throw him off somehow! I jerked my tail so fast that it would have made a snapping noise, but my brother held firm. "Get off!" I declared whipping again, but I somehow overshot it and somehow ended up falling above my brother. At the very least he let go.

"Uh, Toothless..." I heard my brother spoke.

"What?" I snapped. As I tried to reorient myself and continue my dive. Hopefully I had enough time to-

I felt cold, wet, and dizzy. Everything was surrounded in darkness and I couldn't see. I tried to gasp for breath, but there was only a water around me. Dimly, I was aware that I had fallen into the bay, but I failed to grasp how I was going to get out. I was going to drown here at the bottom of the sea andâ€¦ Oh. Duh. I had fins.

While I didn't have a good gulp of fresh air before entering, I had enough to make the trip towards the surface. Dragons had mastery over the sea as well as the skies after all, at least that's what I was told. I motioned my body up and broke the surface, gasping for air in reflex. I shook my head free of water to restore my vision and the first thing I saw was my brother's face.

"What were you _thinking?"_ he said.

I smiled and climbed on board the pier to join my brother. I laughed as I shook myself dry. "I just wanted to have fun! And besides you chased after me!"

My brother shook his head. "So, the right thing to do is _not _chase after you next time?"

I grinned some more. Smiling hurt, everything hurt. But it was all worth it in the end. Hiccup beat me. Who would have known? I sure didn't.

"Hiccup!" I voice called out. My brother and I turned and found Gobber approach, forcing himself through a small assembled crowd of curious Vikings. "Uh, is that you? One of youâ€¦ And who's your friend?"

I lifted the cowl off of my head and turned back into human form, dry as if I was in a desert. "Me!" I said weakly. I took few lazy steps forward and nearly stumbled. I was drained. I didn't even have wings anymore and I still felt like my imaginary wings were strained.

I saw my brother roll his eyes. He tapped the floorboards and bright runes flowed out at his touch. 'IT IS ME - Hiccup. Stuck again.'

Gobber gave us a grimace. "Well, at least you're used to it. Where are the others?"

I turned my head back into the distance up ahead and pointed at horizon. I could barely see the ships or the dragons, the sun's brightness was actually making it harder to see them. "Thereâ€¦" I said lazily.

I saw my brother tap the plank again and the runes shifted, forming another message. 'WE HAVE MUCH TO TALK ABOUT.'

Gobber's grimace darkened. "Right, especially, well, since you're stuck. What happened?"

'ZAPPED BY LIGHTNING.'

I shook my head, snapping out my daze. Right, Hiccup, my brother was the only dragon that could ever be my rival, but that came at a price. He was trapped as one, all because of someone else. Someone I needed to get rid of. "I'll see you later," I said, trying to still sound dizzy. I didn't have to try hard. I moved past Gobber and into the crowd, as the Chief's other Hiccup, they parted out of the way.

"Toothless!" I heard my brother protest.

"I'll be fine," I said. All I had to do was locate his house and then start pillaging.

* * *

><p>After Toothless left, the ships and the Flight slowly arrived. I had no idea where my brother went, but I figure that he might as well take some time off; I know I wanted some after last night. Unfortunately, that meant that I was going to have to deal with a job that I really wasn't prepared for: politics. With my brother gone, it came down to me to address the other leaders and members of the tribal council.<p>

"This is outrageous!" shouted one of the women. The men and women beside her voiced similar opinions though not to the same volume.

I sighed internally. The Council was clearly upset, given the recent revelations I brought and the new immigrants we picked up.

Before I could write a reply, one of the men spoke up fist raised. "We lost half of the men sent on that trip and you've failed to gather any allies to help us recover our Chief!"

I tapped my paw onto a slab of wood and wrote in big runes, 'IT WAS WORTH A TRY-'

But then another man spoke up. "And worst yet, your back to being a...a thing!" shouted another man. "Is this supposed to be a herald of what's to come? Should I warn my brother that he's going to need to set his things in order soon?"

"And then there's the dragons you brought over?" said the woman. "What were you thinking? Are they going to destroy us in their sleep or...?"

Another spoke up, echoing the already stated complaints and worries. And then another spoke up, and then another, before they started having the same people parroting the same concerns.

I tried to think to think up a response, but it was the whole Council against me. Before we set off, they had confidence in my abilities, that they felt like it was the right thing to do to put their trust in me. Back then, I had the power to restore the cursed and the changed and brought home my mother, a long lost hero. Now, it was like I was back to square one again, back to before I was somebody other than a failure.

I heard the hard sound of wood smashing against stone followed by the sound of liquid spilling out. Gobber raised his false hand with the

mug attachment and brought it down again, gaining the attention of everybody whilst spilling mead all over the floor. "Hey, easy there, the lad's still new at this whole Chiefing business!" he declared.

I silently thanked my teacher. At Least someone had my back.

"And he makes a poor Chief!" said one of the men. "Before, he was just a runt; not the best sort of material, but not unheard of. But a dragon as the Chief?"

Gobber shrugged. "And what about Stoick?"

"That doesn't count! He's cursed."

Gobber seemed roll his eyes, as if finding the man's words a little silly. I'll admit, I felt like a double standard was being applied there, but then again, Dad isn't the Chief right now and he's hardly my father.

Gobber set aside his mug and then turned to me. "Remember that the boy's only the 'acting Chief'. Soon as he returns Stoick, things'll be back to normal in no time!" Well, the leadership part at least, but I had no idea about returning anyone back from being a dragon. The runes the King showed me weren't working anymore.

"And how soon is that?" voiced the woman. "How soon will it before the true Chief returns?"

Everyone turned to me.

I gulped, feeling the weight of their eyes as if it was choking the air out of my lungs.

"Go on, lad!" Gobber cheered. "Tell them!"

I hesitated putting my paw onto the wooden board. How was I going to explain this to them? Would they accept it. But eventually, I decided to write. 'I DON'T KNOW.'

Everyone in the room furrowed their brows. That wasn't the answer anyone wanted to hear. Gobber was the only one who didn't seem to want to challenge me and overthrow me or worse. "Go on, explain it," he urged.

I wrote. 'I CANNOT FIGHT MY FATHER. OR THE DRAGON THAT HOLDS HIM CAPTIVE.' This was the truth I hoped I didn't have to accept, but I had no choice. My parent, even as dragons, were a step above me in capabilities. Coupled with experience and powerful abilities, I had no idea how I was going to beat them. The same for the King, who was definitely way above them. And I didn't have any forces to help offset that difference or the fact that the King had forces of his own.

"Then what are we supposed to do!? Wait!?" shouted one of the men.

Another agreed. "We should take action, launch an invasion, something that will-"

Another one of us gathered around the firepit made a noisy

interruption. Gothi pounded her staff repeatedly into the floor. Everyone stopped talking for fear that Gothi would do something spooky. She urged Gobber to come towards her and spoke in his ear.

"Uhâ€¦ she says that only Hiccup can bring back Chief Stoick," he relayed. He didn't look particularly convinced himself; I wasn't either. How was I supposed to do that? Why me?

"Why him?" voiced one of the men.

Another added, "Yeah, what makes him so special?"

For their trouble, Gothi stepped over to them and then whacked them in the helmets with her staff.

"Yow!" they reeled, hurt but not permanently wounded.

"Don't do that!"

Other than rubbing their temples, they didn't do anything other than look at the small old woman's staff with a look that made me think they feared getting struck a second time. Gothi gave them a look that reminded me of Gobber when I first learned how to melt down ore into metal, like they were slow pupils. One thing was for sure, no one messed with Gothi.

'THEY HAVE A POINT, WHAT MAKES ME SO SPECIAL?' I mean, I'm sure there's something that I inherited. Gothi did inform me of my apparently long family tree full of Night Furies and I was sure that there was a good reason I was able to tap into Sorcery so easily, but I didn't see how any of that was supposed to help me.

Gothi gave me a blank look, as if she was telling me that I should know better. She lifted her staff and then pointed at the gates to the Great Hall.

I blinked a few times. What did that have to do with anything?

Gobber bent down and received another message from the old woman. "Uh, this meeting is over...?" he sounded surprised.

"Over?" said one of the men. "But we haven't even decided our course of action, our plan, our-" Gothi raised her staff over the man's head. "-and this meeting is over. I guess weâ€¦ carry on as if nothing happened?"

The old woman seemed to smirk and then removed her staff from the man's personal space.

I just stared at Gothi, trying to figure out what that was all about. I mean, I am glad that she decided to cut the meeting short before we all came to blows, but still, I had to wonder what put her faith in me. I guess I was a little "special", but I doubt that it's because I'm actually in some epic story where there's a prophecy stating that I would defeat the King. I've seen plenty of fantastic things, but prophecies were not one of them. No, it had to be something else. Did she justâ€¦ think I could do it?

Gothi turned and looked at me, bringing her staff over to my head.

Gobber didn't need to let the old woman whisper in her ear to know what she wanted. "I think it's time for you to go."

I hastily nodded and then left the the Great Hall, everyone else departing soon afterward; I didn't want Gothi whacking me on the head either.

Once free, I found Astrid. She stepped forward, accompanied by a few of her dragons, her new assistants. "How did it go? What happens now?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. They're undecided." Technically, that was a bit of a lie. The other council members weren't too keen about having "native" dragons running around town, but with Gothi more or less vetoing the council from making a real decision, who knew? Maybe they'll set up some rules about where the dragons can or can't go around the village, but for the most part, they were here.

Astrid nodded solemnly, as if understanding. She had an idea of how the politics in Berk worked. "So then what do we do now?"

"Get some rest," piped one of the dragons that flanked her side.

Astrid gave the dragon a glare as did the other dragon by her side.

"What? It's night andâ€¦ we're going to need a find a nesting site soon!"

I nodded in affirmation. The sky had darkened since the council meeting began and already the stars shone in the skies above. Plus, I felt tired, weary after dealing with that council meeting, especially since an hour ago I just came back from an extended flight. Rest sounded appealing. "He's right, we're going to have to head back home soon."

At the mention of home, I saw the dragons expressions turn into pale grimaces. It was then I remembered that they weren't allowed to go home because of their oath to serve Astrid. I felt bad for them, being forced to stay with us against their will, but what else was I supposed to do? We couldn't just let them free and return to the King, could we? Maybe there was another way...

Astrid frowned but nodded her head. "Fine. We will deal with this in the morning." She then turned to her dragons. "Come, let us find a place for you to stay."

With that resolution, Astrid and I parted ways.

Flying back to my house was a lonely experience. No one spoke to me, no one called me. There were no lights coming out of my house, no signs that anyone had been inside for a while. My brother was still out there, doing whatever it was he felt was so important and neither of my parents would be inside to greet me. The lights around the village began to dim, letting the darkness have free reign. A part of me wished that I was back half a year ago, when I would often come

home to my father scolding me for some accident; that would have been better than not having anyone at home at all.

After having to fumble with the lock with nothing but really oversized paws, I decided to smash down my own front door; I had been through enough today and quite frankly, I can have that replaced in a jiff. Who was going to come in and attack me anyways?

I shambled onto the floor and laid my back against the wooden floor. My sleeping rock was removed months ago, back when I thought the King's promise didn't come with strings. It looked like I was going to need it again from now on. Why did things have to be so complicated? Why couldn't we have lived in peace?

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of something big and heavy hitting the roof with a thump. I raised my head. It might have been Toothless, finally coming home.

I heard another thumping noise, this time right outside the door and threshold. My brother had landed right outside our door. I scurried over and went to meet him. "Toothless?"

"No," I heard a voice, loud and guttural. Way too off to be my little brother. The door drifted open, no longer held by its frame and I saw a dragon I had not expected to see again in a long time.

"Skullcrusher? What're- what are you here?" I backed away, afraid he was here on some mission by the King. Why was he here? Was he planning on usurping Astrid's title? And how did he know where I lived?

The older dragon grinned, seeming to enjoy my confusion. "I'll explain another time, but first, I'm gonna ask that you don't tell anyone you saw me here."

I frowned. So he wasn't here to bash my head against the wall. "So, then why are you here?"

"Because, kid, things are about to get a little more hectic."

I sighed. Just my luck.

* * *

><p>It took me a few hours to find it, mostly because I hardly knew Mildew before he entered the top five of my most hated foes and mostly because he didn't live anywhere in the village. I found it eventually, an old rundown dwelling at the very edges of the farming fields. Unfortunately, I had to ask directions to find it and that meant sooner or later Hiccup was going to know, but no, this was something I had to do. I was tired of having enemies hurting me and my family and I was going to solve our problems, starting with an old man.<p>

I approached the door and twisted the knob only to find it locked. Of course, even the most hated man in Berk would have done the sensible thing and locked the door to his house. Good thing I decided to take a little something with me on my way over. I took out a small hammer from my pack and lifted it just above the door knob. I then lifted it

a few inches and then brought it down with a loud whack!

I might not have been all that strong, when compared to my father, but I had my tools! I smashed the hammer perpendicular to knob. With each thunderous blow, the knob slowly bent out of shape, deforming until it was nothing but a useless hunk of metal. With the last strike, the knob fell to the ground, its lock disengaged.

For good measure, I kicked the door open, showing just as much care to the old man's house as I was planning to show him.

The inside was dark. There was no fires or light nor any remains of fires smoldering; no one had been here for a while. Figures he wouldn't show, not after what he did to my brother. Sorcerer or no, he knew the fate that awaited him if he showed his face here. As soon as brother informs the others, there was going to be a man hunt and I was determined to get the leg up and lead the chase myself.

I turned to the closest candle and lit it with a piece of tinder in my pocket. I kind of needed it at this point; night had set in.

The inside was typical of a Viking home. Some furs everywhere, some spoils from victories and battles, old weapons, paraphernalia, a small book shelf featuring such joyous titles such as "How to Kill Dragons". There was a seal skin on top of the fireplace right next to what appeared to be a large wolf's head mounted to the walls. The ground was a rather large bear pelt. Overall, this was normal, a typical Viking affair.

Of course, I knew better. Mildew was a sorcerer, or at least had a minor knack for throwing lightning everywhere through his staves. After his first one was crushed at Alvin's hands, he made another one. So then, where did he make it? And if there was a place for it, what else could be there? Experience with my grandfather's little hideaway taught me that if old men had secrets, they hid it somewhere, maybe even in a secret room. Mildew hid a secret, that he was a sorcerer from Berk for who knows how long. So that beg the question, where did he hide his things?

I went over to the bearskin rug and pulled it out of the way and found a trap door with a ladder. The air inside was cold and damp, the chill coming from below almost caused me to hesitate climbing down. Almost. I was too angry to be deterred. I stepped down into the darkness below, bringing my light with me.

Like my grandfather's secret room, Mildew's was rather unusual, though his had a much different flavor. Like above, Mildew had animal skins for decoration, but some of them were not the sort of thing I'd expect most Vikings to have. There was a large skin on the wall, shaped and proportioned like a bear, yet it's head was clearly that of a wolf. Beside that were the heads of dragons, most of them breeds that I've never even heard off. Maybe from the mainland.

Another wall had similarly disturbing oddities. There was a silvery looking sword hung in the center, its hilt pointing to the neck of a decapitated statue of some sort, giving the impression that the blade was the reason the figure was missing its head. The placard at the bottom said, 'LOKI,' the name of one of those gods my brother and father worship. Why Mildew had a statue set up like this was very disturbing, but I completely lack understanding of the intended

message.

More disturbing than the statue was the small collection of amulets beside it. They weren't the same shape or metal as the ones my friends had, but a part of me feared how Mildew obtained them. Hopefully, not dragons disguised among humans.

Moving on, I found something that seemed out of place among this collection of trophies. Hung upon the wall in a small glass frame was what appeared to be a piece of parchment, one that looked older than me. On the top, it read in black, 'I AM SORRY. I CANNOT STAY. I HAVE TO GO,' then on the bottom, written in red were the words, 'YOU TRIED TO LEAVE.' I didn't know what the meaning of all that was, but I had the suspicion that whatever it was, it wasn't good.

I shook my head. I wasn't here to look through nicknacks. I moved over to the table at the opposite end of the room, there were papers on it and I figured that if there were any spells or documents I could find something about where Mildew had gone off to.

I took a seat and set my candle near to my left and fumbled through the nearest paper. It seemed to be a map of the Archipelago featuring some small islands. Some of them encircled or planted with X's, though I can't understand-

"Ooh, a map?"

I jerked out my chair and fell to the ground in a startled jolt, fearing that whoever said that was going to gut me for finding place. "Get away and-" But then I blinked and saw the grinning face of my would be attacker. "-Camicazi!? What're you doing here? Shouldn't you be with your mom or something?"

The Bog Burglar laughed. "Oh, Mum thinks I'm with her, but you know, that dummy Hiccup made for me all those months ago still works as a nice stunt double!"

"But how'd you get her? I mean, we didn't see your ship!"

"Well, that's because I stowed away on one of yours!" she cheered. "It was easy with what most of your Hooligans bein' wellâ€|Hooligans."

It sounded like an insult to my Tribe. Really, Camicazi? "I'm a Hooligan," I reminded her.

"That you are!" she cheered, undeterred. "And I said only most Hooligans."

"Fine, fine." I gave Camicazi stern look as she offered her hand to pick me up, still smiling. I really had no idea what she was trying to imply by that. I shook my head. Whatever, didn't care that much about it. Besides, maybe it was a good thing I met Camicazi here. "Say, how do you feel like mugging an old man?"

"Well, most old men don't deserve to be mugged!" she declared. "But Mildew isn't like most old men!"

"Excellent." Now it was my turn to smile.

50. Chapter 50

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

Where was Stormfly? She should have been back by now. I mean, how hard was it to get the others? I needed my Knights! I paced around myâ€ Den, waiting for her to come. It felt so small now, like one wrong move can topple anything within my dwelling. My tail ended up causing my axe to fall off its resting place twice already and I was losing patience. Now, I knew what it felt to be like the Night Fur- I mean Hiccup! Gah!

The last time I had been a Nadder, I had avoided coming back to my home fully transformed when the male- Hiccup changed me back. This time, I wasn't so fortunate.

I heard a knocking at the wooden blocking my entrance- door! Gah. I shook my head and called out. "Stormfly!"

"Astrid?" It wasn't her. No, it was my father. "You alright in there?"

I huffed. No, I wasn't my head felt like it was splitting in two as I kept trying to fight back against the mess of thoughts and ideas that swarmed in my head. Terms and ideas that I knew since I was a child were given new meanings and contexts that replaced the old. I had to constantly struggle to maintain the right ways of thinking, but it was so hard to do so when my body was not Herd. When my King- no the Red Death, made that bargain for me to be Kin, he was not talking about in body only. "I am," I lied, not that it would do any good. Herd did not speak like Kin did.

"Right," my father clearly didn't seem convinced. He didn't understand me, not really. All he could do was guess and make general statements. "Well, there's someone at the door for you, uh, some of your friends..."

"Noted," I called, even when I knew he only heard my roars as noise. Besides, if my companions were calling me, maybe Stormfly was with them.

I pushed my snout against the door and pushed outward. Father stepped out of the way as I made my way out, looking obviously displeased, but not angry.

I suddenly felt veryâ€ dirty with his gaze over me. I should have been able to stand up to a little of his scrutiny, but lately, I've been much more self conscious about what anyone thought when looking at me. I knew what it he was displeased by, yet I don't feel like I grasp it when another part of me feels like I look perfect. I hurried out of his sight, the sooner to get away from the shame I felt.

I stepped out the Den's front entrance to find myself greeted by a few familiar faces, each greeting me with an awkward grin. Meatlug and Fishlegs stood from and center while Barf and Belch flanked them in the sides. Yet there was not Stormfly and Hookfang and Snotlout were nowhere to be seen.

"Uh, hiâ€|" Fishlegs said, obviously uncomfortable. "Uh, Stormfly sent us."

I nodded. Thankfully, my right talon did her task, but where was she now? "So, where is she?"

They shrugged. Apparently not knowing. "Notta clue," said Meatlug.

I sighed. Where could she be? Did I have to chase after her? She's normally so trustworthy. And honest, because when she lies, it's plainly obvious that she is. Fine, I'll get her later. Most likely, Hookfang and his liege were out dealing with Firewyrms, whatever new "crisis" she decided to have, but where were Tuffnut and Ruffnut? Goofing off? "Where are the twins?"

And then as if on cue, several of my Kin descended onto the ground like some sort of stampede. They ran through the.. pathways, no roadways and streets dodging and darting between dwellings and Herd alike, sowing chaos and dissent where they went. I scowled. Typical of them. We spent all of last night trying to reassure the neighbors that my Flight was of not going to cause a disturbance and then the twins come and ruin that.

I turned to my friends, Barf and Belch. "And why didn't you stop 'em?"

Both males' faces lit up with an awkward grin. They didn't say a word.

I scowled. "Chase after them."

Both males exchanged a few snickers with each other, probably telling me that this was all planned out. They then dashed off, their faces bearing even more unbearable grins. I felt like I got played for a sucker.

I shook my head. I suppose I didn't need thoseâ€| fools right now. I turned towards the two that were available to me. "You will have to act as my Knights from now on."

Meatlug responded with apparent surprise. "But, I'm just a Squire!" she cried. "And how's Fish supposed to do _that?"_

"Wait, what?" Fishlegs asked the female, beads of sweat dripping from his face like he was nervous. "What's Astrid want me to do?"

"She wants us to serve as a Knight!" Meatlug replied. "I mean, I know a bit of the basics, but I'm not even landed or anything! And you'reâ€| well, I don't think any human has ever been a Knight before."

Fishlegs blinked several times, as if trying to disbelieve. "Uh, Astrid," he turned to me. "Are you sure that's a good idea? I mean, I'm not the best fighterâ€|?"

I nodded my head. "And yet you still managed to plow through several of my Kin in a single swoop," I reminded, looking over at Meatlug to do the translation. Of course, Fishlegs still did not understand the tongue of my Kin and my Kin wouldn't understand him; I had forgotten about that. I shook my head. I'll have to think of something, I could

ask the Night Fur- HICCUP! I could ask _Hiccup_ to provide that potion or maybe whip up some sort of way to communicate. Hopefully the later, changing Fishlegs would be a last resort and I really doubt that was a good use of his talents.

Fishlegs's expression seemed to grow even more uneasy as Meatlug relayed my words to him. "But, I mean, aren't there better people for that?"

I shown my teeth, almost amused by that statement. I simply twisted my head over to the four blondes as they rounded around the pathways and Herd Dens with a small chunk of my Flight. "Are there?" I questioned him.

Fishlegs nodded in an almost timid manner; he saw my point. "Yeah, right."

For a moment, I felt like I was being rather hard on the male. He wasn'tâ€¦ suited to the warrior life. He was far too shy and far too passive to really make a good Knight. I suppose I could get Hookfang and Snotlout to fill in instead, butâ€¦ competence is not something I associated with either of them. Stormfly would be my first but she wasn't here right now and both of the Night Furies had their own problem, so I doubted I could rely on them either. I could also look if any of the members of my Flight would be suited to lead, but I didn't have full trust of any of them just yet; they were subordinates, not allies. I sighed, realizing my dilemma. Either I be aggressive and make the male miserable or I end up with problems without having stable leadership.

I turned over to Meatlug, deciding that I should work at the problem one step at a time. "Will you serve me?"

Meatlug seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then nodded her head. "I'm not exactly the best person suited for it, but there aren't many options eitherâ€¦ I'll have to."

I shone my teeth again. Good, one problem down, on to the next. I turned back to Fishlegs. With Meatlug working under me, I hoped that that would have been incentive enough to join in as well. I didn't like the idea of forcing or coercing Fishlegs this way, but maybe it'd be better this way. "Will you serve me now?"

Meatlug relayed my question.

"I'm still not able to talk to them," he said. Of course, the communication problem was still an issue.

"Well, there is a way," hinted Meatlug, her voice sounding a little more shrill as if she was holding back some sort of unease. "You knowâ€¦ thatâ€¦"

Fishlegs's face seemed to have trouble deciding what color to turn as if the question made him struggle between choosing sickness and embarrassment. "Uh, yeah, that."

I nodded. "The thought occurred to me, but I am not going to force it upon you." Changing was the simplest and the least painful way to deal with Fishlegs's inability to communicate with my Flight. It skipped over the trouble of having to establish some sort of Herd to

Kin protocols that my entire Flight could follow, though Fishlegs would have to adjust to his new body if he took that option.

"Thanks, I guessâ€¦" Fishlegs seemed to settle upon turning red, .

Meatlug was even brighter than Fishlegs. "Well, think of the possibilitiesâ€¦" she sounded so shrill. I suppose the topic was something she had avoided bringing up, yet felt strongly about. She clearly had thought about it, maybe even hoped Fishlegs would one day become Kin like her. I mean, after all, she did kind of agree to become his sort-of mate.

Our musings were interrupted by the stampede rolling towards us and nearly tramping the two others. They both quickly bolted past me and into my Den, narrowly avoiding getting trampled.

"That was close!" Fishlegs blurted.

I scowled and poked my head out of my entrance's mouth. "Watch where you're going!" I shouted. But they didn't listen. Why hadn't someone done anything by now? A small chunk of my Flight was having a rampage and there was no response as of yet. Not even the rest of my Kin were doing anything about it, apparently content to just stay out of the way and sleep on grounds. Of course, this was just typical; the twins practically got away with anything and everything, the fact they had two more accomplices changed nothing.

"Areâ€¦ we going to do something about them?" asked Meatlug, a hint of fear in her voice.

I shrugged and let out a puff of steam from my nostrils. "You are," I said. "Your first duty as Knights is to detain them and bring order to my Flight.

Fishlegs and Meatlug both seemed to pale. "Oh, rightâ€¦" said Fishlegs.

"But, then where'd you be?" Meatlug asked.

"Finding my other Knight." I didn't say anything more. I took off and let my new Knights handle the job. They weren't fully minted or anything, not that I thought they needed it. They should be fine against the blondes. Besides, I had enough upsets for one morning; there was no way I was going to put up with the twins _again._

I flew up and above my home Nest and did a quick survey of the area, using eyes sharp enough to pick a mouse hidden amongst the grass. I did not find her in the area around my parent's Den. Where could that Nadder gone off to?

I was however sure that there was one place she could have gone of to. After all, I knew she was close friends with the other Night Fu-Toothless. Gah, sooner or later, I should consider taking measures to break my- no, _the Red Death's_ hold upon me. Maybe thoseâ€¦ teeth on sticks would work, though maybe that was too risky given what happened to my m-_Hiccup! _I shook my head; why was it that I could get everyone else's names right, but not those two? Was it part of that spell I am under? Whatever, what mattered was that my Knight

could have been at _Toothless's _Den. Both of them were close friends, so maybe she went there! And even if she wasn't, I was sure that I had some business with the Night Furyâ€¦ as soon as I could think up something.

I flew over to the Den where _Hiccup_ resided in, making quick scans of the area beneath me. No one seemed to pay attention to me, since they were well used to the idea of Kin flying overhead from the problems we had many moons ago. The only things I found were that several Kin wandered through the pathways in a near aimless fashion. I wondered if any of them were mine and how many of them were the few Herd that chosen to stay as Kinâ€¦ and I wondered how soon it would be before Hiccup's spell broke apart.

I landed outside of Hiccup's front _door_ and motioned my tail to strike the wood to alert him of my presence. Yet as I slapped my tail against the door, it opened, providing no resistance other than a creaking noise. I blinked, the door frame seemed...broken now that I thought about it, with several pieces of it having fallen to the floor, like something forced its way through. Maybe some dissidents forced their way inside andâ€¦ I didn't dare think about that.

I tightened my muscles and went on my guard, fearing the worst. I crept inside, the interior lit up by the bright glowing sun. Everything seemed fine, nothing seemed out of place. "Hiccup?" I called out, trying to find him.

I heard a groaning noise in the center of the living room, behind the chairs. He was sprawled over the floor in a lazy, almost haphazard fashion, like he just fell there. I crept over to the still Night Fury's body, trying to find out what could have happened. Did someone beat him unconscious or invade his home? What could have done this?

"Hiccup?" I called out, nudging my nose against his. "Wake up."

"Toothless?" the words escaped his lips. He was still alive and not in any critical condition; that was good.

"No. Me!" I called out.

"Astrid?" his eyes fluttered open, his gaze looking rather weary and tired. He must have been beat up or something.

"What happened here?" I said. "Who did this to you?"

He blinked at me, in a daze. "What? Astrid, are you talking about? Oh, he might have had a concussion or some other lingering head trauma.

"Someone invaded your Den!" I shouted, hoping to rouse him. "Who hurt you?"

"Well, there wasâ€¦" The Night Fury's eyes fluttered a few times more as if trying to think of the answer.

"Who did it?" I demanded. Maybe it was Toothless, angry at his brother for some slight. Or perhaps Mildew stuck his wrinkled out again. Or perhaps _the Red Death_ sent an assassin!

The Night Fury blinked a few times, his eyes widening as he slowly regained consciousness. "Oh, well, that was meâ€¦" he said, yawning. "Is Toothless home yet? He should have been back by now..."

"Uh, noâ€¦ I didn't see him." I blinked, trying to process what the Night Fury just said. He destroyed his own front entrance? And now that I thought about it Hiccup didn't seem beat up so much as he seemedâ€¦ tired, weary. "Uh, did you sleep at all?"

"Tried to," he groaned. He shook his head. "Too much to think about afterâ€¦" He paused and lipped his lips several times.

"After what?" I asked, hoping to get an answer. My sworn mate seemed exhausted enough I had to wonder if he was conscious enough to remember his own sentences.

"Ask me another time," he replied. Which made me more anxious. What wasn't he telling me? Andâ€¦ was that dried blood on his neck? Due to enchantment put upon both of us, wounds and injuries faded quickly, but certain things always got leftover, usually the blood that leaked out of a cut. He shook his head and blinked several times. "What brought you over here?"

"I wanted to find Stormfly," I answered. But instead, all I found was a sleepy Night Fury who was hiding something. Where could have the other Night Fury and my Nadder gone off to?

There was a gentle knocking at the door, but the door creaked open at the lightest touch. "Hiccup?" I heard a voice call.

"Toothless?" the Night Fury muttered, stumbling to his feet. We both turned to the entrance.

"...What happened to the front door?" he said, almost sounding lost and confused. He stepped inside, carrying what appeared to be his pack; did he ever stop by his home at all before now?

"Oh, you know how I sometimes destroy things," the Night Fury said, almost embarrassed sounding. His tail wagged unsteadily, as if trying to suppress something.

"It looksâ€¦ forced," Behind him came Stormfly, also carrying her pack. Wait, why did she have that? I mean, shouldn't it have been at my Den? Why was she carrying it now at all times?

And after they came in, another figure stepped into the Night Fury's Den: Camicazi. She whistled at the sight of the door, as if impressed. Wait, why was Camicazi here?

I squinted my eyes at the Bog Burglar, attempting to discern her motives. She was a close friend of mine, maybe a bit of a rival, but why wasn't she at home with her mother? What was she doing here?

The female noticed me paying attention to her and then waved a hand in my direction, smiling brightly. "Hey Astrid!" she sounded cheery.

Toothless shook his head, as if trying to ward off thinking about the door. "Whatever, Hiccup, I'm setting off on a journey. A Quest."

"A Quest?" Hiccup mouthed, his expression seemed to become more awake, more active at the mention of an activity.

He nodded. "Yes. We're leaving today."

Hiccup stood still and his body seemed to go limp at his brother's words. Suddenly why Toothless and everyone else wore packs made more sense. Quests often involved a voyage to somewhere away from home for an extended period of time, often to dangerous lands and treacherous seas. Toothless and the others were leaving. "But why?" he said.

"To go after Mildew," he answered. "Someone has to."

"But so soon?" the Night Fury pleaded.

The male shook his head. "The trail might grow too cold if we wait. We're going now."

Stormfly and Camicazi both affirmed the male's word with nods of their own.

Hiccup bowed his head.

But I suddenly felt a fury grow inside of me directed at a certain red head "You're going!" I shouted, my gaze directed at Stormfly. "Why didn't you tell me?" I felt betrayed. My closest friend was going off on some wild chase after some useless old Herd. One that I would have wanted to bite the head off myself, but one that I couldn't afford to chase after just yet. "I need you here!" I shouted. "My Flight needs you!"

Stormfly's head dipped down to the ground. She looked guilty, maybe even enough to reconsider. But then she raised her head her eyes seemed to shine with a brighter resolve. "Toothless needs me more," she said. "Someone has to keep him safe."

"Well, you don't have to come," muttered Camicazi. At least someone was on my side.

Stormfly looked at the Bog Burglar with mild irritation, not sure what that comment was about. I wasn't sure either. She shook her head. "You don't breathe fire. Or fly."

Camicazi's expression seemed to twist into a playful grin, as if amused by the challenge.

I sneered; I didn't have time to play games. I turned to Hiccup who mostly faded to the back of the room. "Aren't you going to do something? He is your brother!"

The Night Fury nodded, agreeing with me. "Toothless, we don't have time to chase after Mildew; we have to prepare to face the King!"

"One week!" declared the male. "We're going to make a short trip to this island, fly over there to save time. We

"I don't think we have a week!" declared the Night Fury.

Toothless brushed him. "Then I'll be back sooner than that!" he said.

The two brothers bickered with each other, similar to what they did last time, arguing about specifics and who was doing the right thing, but it wasn't as intense as it was last time. I suppose compared to their mother, an old man no one really cared about didn't compare.

For a moment, I wondered what gave Hiccup the ideas he was spouting. I guess that it was pretty much inevitable we'd face my Lo- the _Red Death_ eventually after all of the crimes we've committed against him, but where'd this idea that we might not have a week before we faced him. What- or who told him that?

Eventually, the two brothers came to a resolution, one that didn't involve increasing the volume until my eardrums popped or the pair storming off in opposite directions; it all appearedâ€¦ cordial. Maybe it was a sign that they'd grown a little closer over the months.

"At least take more weapons," Hiccup demanded.

The other brother shook his head. "No, we need to travel light."

So, with that way of keeping the would-be adventurers here effectively shut down, I turned back to Stormfly. "You should have told me."

Stormfly shook her head. "I just learned about it this morning; I had to get ready."

Camicazi shrugged. "You can't expect the Stormfly to be perfect."

Stormfly and I both turned to her, wondering the same thing. Now I really want to know what she has against Stormfly.

I shook my head. I realized by now there was no point arguing against it. Stormfly was going with them, whether or not I needed her to help manage my Flight. "Fine. But you better come back," I said. If they were going after Mildew, there was a good chance of a confrontation with the old man. Last time I met him, I ended up his hostage and zapped by lightning; I survived but that was only due to the fact that I could pretty much heal through most injuries. Stormfly, my most trusted friend, did not have that advantage.

Stormfly bowed her head. For a brief moment, I saw her cheeks turn red before she hid them underneath her white scarf. "I will."

51. Chapter 51

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****Oh boy, the first week in a long time I've been able to get two chapters out. Enjoy.****

I groaned, grasping my cheek to keep myself from feeling that pained tingling. It stung, bad. Gah, what I wouldn't give for the power to just recover from my wounds once again. My injury probably bruised by now, ruining my reflection for the next few weeks!

"Are you okay, Snotlout?" I saw Hookfang come near me, putting his palms over my wrist, a look of concern in his eyes.

I glowered and pushed him off, I didn't need any sympathy from him. "I'm fine," I insisted, trying to keep a straight face. Ow. It was harder than it looked.

He rolled his eyes. "You brought that upon yourself you know. Sis, really hasn'tâ€| settled with everything that's been happening so far. Especially Astrid."

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered. Sometime during noon, Astrid and Firewrym ended up having a bit of a heatedâ€| discussion over the nature the her Flight. I think about the pecking order and how Firewrym was not all that thrilled to be serving under Berk by proxy. I don't know. Maybe it was about food or lodging or something. I think most of the dragons slept on the streets last night.

I heard my father laugh and then before I knew it, he was right behind me. "You probably shoulda chosen better, boy."

I turned to him and squinted my gaze. What was he talking about?

Dad seemed to know. He laughed some more, though this time sounding moreâ€| pained, I think. "You know, I am aware Astrid's kind of gone an' gotten all... Nadder-ry, And... got that ahh, boyfriend-"

I cringed, upon realizing what he was talking. The fact that I realized that Dad was giving me romance advice was bad enough, but that reminder. No, he wasn't reminding me of anything. Astrid and Hiccup were not, you know, an item. That guy was still out of her league and they were totally different species right now! "Dad!" I snapped, waving my free arm in his face.

My father whistled, making me feel even more uncomfortable. "But really... Maybe you shouldn't be so quick to find someone else? At least not someone so, how do I put this? ...frustrating?"

I rolled my eyes and groaned, this time from sheer annoyance rather than pain. He thinks I gave up on Astrid and decided to go get anotherâ€| girl. Though, was that better than letting him know the truth? I'm sure my Dad probably would find her even moreâ€| frustrating if he realized what she was. Hopefully, Dad was not paying too close attention to her name and how overtly dragon it was or listening to her protests aboutâ€| everything. One thing was for sure: "She's not my girlfriend!"

Father rolled his eyes. "Well, you could do better anyways." Then he cracked a wide, nervous smile as he turned to Hookfang. "No offense to you, lad, but uh.. "

"No, I perfectly agree," Hookfang spoke. "But she's family."

Dad uttered another chuckle. "So long as you know."

Then there was a knocking on the door. I jumped at the chance to find some other topic other than me and Firewrym and bounced out of my seat. I hastily opened the door, not even bothering to check who it was; besides, anyone who caused me trouble would probably learn why we kept weapons near the threshold. "Hey, what'd you need andâ€¦ What happened to you?"

To my surprise it was Fishlegs, especially since the guy looked rather beat up. There was a load of dirt all over his torn up tunic. Fruit paste creamed his hair in a mess that vaguely reminded of some sort of statue. And a bunch of other things like the small cut on his exposed shoulders or the fact that one of his eyes looked somewhat bloodshot. "Twins, both of them. They'reâ€¦ tied up right now. Uh, is Firewrym here?" he muttered, which was the most unnerving part about him. He sounded completelyâ€¦ nervous, as if he didn't even realize he looked like a wreck and was driving me on edge just looking at him.

"Uh...no?" I said.

Fishlegs sighed in relief. "Good. Then she won't rip me appart."

"Yeah, goodâ€¦" I guess that was a good thing, but Fishlegs probably didn't understand that_ she _thought he would _rip_ _her appart. _ I mean, Firewrym gets really nervous when around the guy, even though he's a total wimp most of the time just because of that lucky hit. Of course, I should probably inform her about that... when he looks a little less like some sort of marketplace draugr. I shook my head. I really didn't want the guy over, not after sending Firewrym into a building. "Just tell me what you need," I demanded.

"Uh, uhâ€¦" stuttered the larger guy. Yup, total wimp. He can't even ask me something.

I yawned. "Well?" I urged.

"I, uh, I need." At least he made some progress.

"Need what?" I asked.

"I needâ€¦" And now he was stuck again. Typical.

I rolled my eyes. "Tell me!" I demanded.

"I want you to turn me into a Gronckle!" He shouted in response and then clamped his mouth with an embarrassed whimper.

I just stood there, eyes wide. Fishlegs just asked me to turn him into a dragon. Am I getting that right? I heard from somewhere behind me the sound of a mug dropping onto the floor and spilling. Was Dad also listening to this? "...what?"

Fishlegs blushed from behind his big meaty hands. "Uh, nothing, forget I said anything."

I shook my head, still stunned. I don't think I'll ever forget that. "Oh, you said something nowâ€¦"

He blurted out. "Okay, just whip up that potion! You know, _that_"

one!" Afterwards, he covered his own mouth again.

I blinked, still trying to get what this guy was trying to ask me. Fishlegs was asking _me, _of all people, to go whip up that very drink that started all of these crazy things. He was pretty much asking me to curse him! "Butâ€|but," I let out; my tongue suddenly felt like it was stung by a bee or something.

I heard my father get up from his seat and step behind me. "Are you crazy, lad? You're practically asking for a curse put on yourself!"

Fishlegs backed away a step, sweat trickling down his face. He let out a nervous sounding noise. "Uh...uh, I am?" he sounded so unsure.

I shook my head. What was up with Fishlegs? Why was he asking for me to give him an obviously cursed potion? I mean, it probably would be funny to let the guy have it, but what kind of insanity drove the Fishlegs to _ask me_. "Why don't you ask Hiccup about it? It's his drink!"

"Can't, no hands," whimpered the larger boy. "And Toothless is elsewhereâ€| figured you'd be the one to do it for me."

"That's not happening! Oh I'm sure Fishlegs can provide me the ingredients and the recipe; I just doubted I'd do anything. I mean, sure, I made that magic rock to protect me against fire a while back, but I'm sure it's a fluke. Besides, he hurt Firewrym."

Fishlegs's face twisted into an uneasy frown. "But, why?"

My Dad grunted an affirmation, as if pleased by my answer. "Only a coward resorts to magic, instead of using more _proper _ things like weapons, armor, and skill. My boy here would never deal with that sort of thing, not unless he was forced to!"

I frowned, suddenly feeling a bit guilty. My runestone in that pouch near my belt seemed to change from a small stone into a large boulder. I mean, I did kind of rely on a spell I wove to protect me when I wanted to fight and kill Hookfangâ€| Nah! I mean, that was there to make sure I didn't turn into a dragon because I got burned.

"My Liege," I heard Hookfang's voice coming from behind me. "A word?"

I turned to nod at Hookfang, feeling almost compelled to abide. Yeah, I kinda do owe him some form of acknowledgement. "Uh, sureâ€|" I then turned my back on Fishlegs and stepped back into the house.

My Dad laughed. "Well, you got your answer, he's not doing it!" he bellowed.

"But-" I heard Fishlegs try to say something, but Dad cut him off.

"Good bye," said my father before closing the door.

I turned back to Hookfang. My companion led me forward as if he

wanted to stay as far away from my father as possible, not that I blamed him. The whole subject of people turning into dragons was not something he liked; Dad only tolerated Hookfang and Firewrym only because of pity due to my uncle making up some fake sob story while they were out drinking one night.

It wasn't until we were on the other side of the house that Hookfang stopped leading me. "Alright, so what do you want?" I asked. "And don't stutter, I get enough of that from Fishlegs."

Hookfang nodded and for a silent moment seemed to consider his words; at least it wasn't stuttering. After a minute, he answered. "I think you should help Fishlegs."

I blinked. Really? "And why should I? I mean, he did hurt your sister."

Hookfang's expression turned into a partially suppressed grin. "She always needed to be brought down a peg, was it?"

I glowered. "She's your sister."

Hookfang's expression turned into a frown, not sure why. "Point is, maybe it'd be a good idea to help Fishleg along."

I caught the change in topic, but I decided I was fine with it. "So, why help him?" And that was assuming I could. I heard about what other people get when the potion doesn't work out like expected. As much as I don't like Fishlegs for what he did, I wasn't going to kill the guy over it yet.

"Because Meatlug would want it." Before I could ask "And why help Meatlug?", Hookfang answered with a question. "How far would you go if I meant being with Astrid or my sister?"

"But she's not!" I sighed. First Dad and now my best friend thinks I had a thing for her. I mean, just because we happen to be Nightmares when I was a dragon. I shook my head. "Fine, fine, I'll do it just-" I scanned around us. Dad wasn't here. "-don't tell Dad."

Hookfang nodded solemnly. "I knew you'd understand. I'll tell Fishlegs to meet you some other time."

"Right," I growled. I can't believe I was forced into doing this, but fine.

I backed away from Hookfang, deciding I was done with him for now. Just then I realized my face didn't hurt so much, that my palm wasn't over my cheek where I got beat - I mean took a hit like a man! I figured that it was strange it didn't hurt anymore and that I didn't pay attention to it until now. Maybe all that annoying talk was distracting me from the pain, but then where'd all the hurt go?

I touched my cheek and to my shock, I did not feel my skin. The texture was off, too rough to be human, more like scales.

In a jolt I dashed into my room and pulled out a small hand mirror from my belongings, angling the small piece of bronze so that I could catch a good look at my face. The mirror did not reflect colors all

that well, but it was plainly obvious to see the small sheet of scales forming on my cheek.

I was turning back into a Nightmare. The spell that kept my human was ending.

* * *

><p>I felt strange being a Night Fury for so long. For months, I was unwilling or unable to assume this shape, but in the past few days, I found myself taking this body more and more, usually to take advantage of the wings that I almost forgot how to use. I was not truly a Night Fury, I feel, but the fact that seemingly everyone in my mother's line was one had me wonder. Were there any Night Furies that I wasn't related to? It didn't matter.

"Are we there yet?" Stormfly questioned, rousing me from my thoughts.

"Almost," I promised, licking my lips in anticipation. I took a moment to check our route, plotting out which seamarks I wanted to pass by. Where we wanted to go wasn't too far away, all things considered, but it was still a lengthy enough flight that the afternoon sun slowly descended against the horizon. Night would fall by the time we encountered that wretched old man and I was perfectly fine with that. I wanted my greatest weapon and armor, the darkness itself when I took him down.

"We better be there," Camicazi spoke, bored, yet it almost sounded as if she perfectly understood our Dragonese. More likely, she knew us enough to guess. She sounded bored, maybe weary that we were flying for so long. She rode atop me in my Night Fury guise, the form I was born with and knew well. Stormfly offered to take her, but she rejected that for some reason.

Stormfly, herself, flew beside me, rolling her eyes at the Bog Burglar's comment. "Not like you're the one flying."

I heard the Bog Burglar utter a chuckle, as if amused.

Since I carried Camicazi, Stormfly took most our things. Supplies, weapons, food; you name it, she had it. She didn't have a proper saddle like my brother did once upon a time, but they were firmly tied against her body.

I didn't care too much about what went on around me; I had a much simpler, more important things to think about. For example, should I rip out Mildew's throat or shove an arrow down it? That was an important question!

Night fell as I led the way, I filled my thoughts with how I intended to end this night and how I was to prove once and for all that no enemy of my family was going to live to tell the tale.

As darkness descended upon us, I found our goal, a small island crowned by a single small peak, out of place and relatively alone. It wasn't large compared to other islands, but it was certainly large enough to make finding Mildew difficult or hide a dragon.

We descended upon the closest beach and set up a small camp. Even if

we found Mildew, we were going to need to stay overnight. Camicazi got off me whilst Stormfly set down her things, though it was difficult without assuming human form. I however chose to stay a dragon a little while longer, feeling that I wanted to let the old man see me as the monster he thought I was. Besides, I wanted to take advantage of my "natural" senses.

I would have lit a small campfire with some scavenged firewood, but I knew better than to betray our position like that; smoke would have been visible if there was enough of it and our enemy was so close. Instead, Camicazi lit a lantern. Stormfly separated our belongings and Camicazi made a short inventory of what weapons and resources we had, a follow up to our preparations earlier, just to make sure we had everything.

I coiled around the flame I created, watching our surroundings for any signs of the old man. Nothing so far, not even a scent trail.

Camicazi took out our map and then tilted her gaze out to the stars. "Well, we shoul' be in where we wanna be!" she chirped.

"Should be?" Camicazi questioned.

The Bog Burglar simply smiled, again guessing.

I turned towards the map and did a double check, just to make sure. It was already late enough that even if this island was not our desired destination, we would still be forced to stay the night over. Thankfully, the stars above seemed to be in the right places, I mean, we should have turned at the right angles after all. "We're where we want to be," I confirmed.

Stormfly nodded. "We should begin our search then."

"Alright, Camicazi I need you to-" Oh, right. She couldn't understand me. Right. I put a claw into the sand and began writing. 'GO WITH STORMFLY.'

The Bog Burglar frowned, as if disliking my choice. "But why?"

Stormfly gave her a look.

"I mean, the Stormfly is nice all, but she don' need little ol me, does she?"

I frowned. 'I NEED STEALTH,' I wrote. This was sure annoying, like, really. I briefly considered wishing I had my brother's power to write things at a whim, but then I remembered the price attached to that claw of his.

Camicazi sighed and then got on the dragon. I have no idea what's gotten into her lately and I wondered what that problem was. Was there some bad blood between Stormfly and her now? I mean, Stormfly herself didn't seem to know any more than I did, so it's apparently one sided.

I didn't want to waste too much time on thinking on it, so I just took off and then circled the island. With my darkened scales and

with no Bog Burglar dressed in brightly colored clothing, I should have been practically invisible; with my keen sight and low intensity echolocation, nothing was invisible to me. I scanned the island, letting my senses give me as much information as I slowly glided around the perimeter of the place. Other than our own light, there were no other lights that I could see, but that was not a sign that my foe wasn't here.

The darkness hid nothing from my gaze and I eventually managed to find something rather interesting on the beach. Narrowing my gaze even further, I saw that it was a small ship of some sort, too small to be a "proper" longship, a rowboat maybe? I scanned the area around the boat some more finding something leading from the boat and running inland, but disappearing once the sand turned into hard ground. Were those Mildew's tracks?

I landed near the boat, finding it mostly empty save for the oars and a small makeshift sail. It made sense however for the boat to be utterly lacking in provisions and belongings. Mildew was likely in a rush to leave Fort Sinister when the battle began. He likely only had whatever he could take with him when he left. Still, that made me wonder what he hoped to find here, what could be worth fleeing for his life to some deserted island?

It probably didn't matter.

I took a closer look at the small boat and briefly considered if my anger was reason enough to do what I was about to do; it was I hated myself for it. I bent down into the boat and took a good long sniff, taking in the stench that the old man would have left just by sitting in a single spot for atleast a good chunk of a day. The smell wasâ€¦ fresh in the sense that it was made recently, but it was hardly what I'd call refreshing. Mildew's stench reminded me of a mix of really old goat cheese, moldy bread, and actual mildew that was only made bearable by the sea breeze eroding away at the smell; I should know after putting up with the twins last month.

I stuck out my tongue and then promptly took a drink of seawater to dull the impact of that odor. Well, atleast I got to counter one bad thing with one good thing; I had really forgotten how good seawater tasted to a dragon. It was more refreshing than I thought.

"Toothless!" I heard Stormfly cry, her voice getting louder as she approached.

The Nadder and Bog Burglar landed right next to me, their gaze afixed upon the ship. "Oh, looks like ya found somethin' already!" said the Bog Burglar. "Must be his gettaway ship!"

"Quiet," I ushered them to do. "He might hear us." I already wrote the word 'QUIET', for Camicazi. In either case, I didn't want Mildew to hear us before I was ready to break him.

Both of them complied with hushed tones and simple movements of her heads.

Stormfly then spoke in a whisper. "His prints do not seem to go far in land, perhaps I should take a sniff so tha-"

"NO!" I roared.

Both of the girls looked at me. "So, we can't go causin' ruckus, but you can?" Camicazi beamed.

I motioned one of my wings to slap the side of my face. Great, you make a rule about being stealthy and you break it within the minute. Aren't you so proud of yourself? I shook my head. "I've already got his scent. You don't need to take it in, Stormfly!" And good thing she didn't. I don't want her to bear that stench, she's too important to me to deal with that.

"Okayâ€|" Stormfly sounded unsure of herself, as if the confidence was sucked out of her.

I gave her an uneasy look. Hopefully she understands.

Camicazi simply observed, probably trying to guess at things she couldn't understand. "So, we gonna follow that trail or what?"

I smiled at the two of them and then followed the footprints into the grassy lands ahead. Soon as I did, the physical trail stopped and the scent trail began. I might have only got a brief smell of Mildew through where he was sitting, but it was enough to actually infer something even with how out of practice I was. Scent was an odd thing in this body. It was no where near as good as my improved sight or hearing, yet it was the sense that I had the least practice with due to simple disuse. I mean, how often did I use my human sense of smell for anything compared to hearing or sight?

As I followed the trail as it winded through trees and rocks, I heard a noise that resembled something like wood pounding against metal. Me and my friends all looked at each other, confirming we could all hear it. We then advanced, keeping our bodies low to the ground and using whatever available cover we had.

Camicazi jumped ahead, now that I no longer needed to guide the others every step of the way. She made silent gestures every few paces, letting us know when it was the right time to advance or not. It helped that she was the one with both the smaller frame and greater experiance at ground stealthâ€| being a large black dragon with glowing eyes against the greens and browns was not ideal, not even in the night.

Eventually, I was able to hear more of the noise that caught our attention. "Stupid door! Open!" I heard in Mildew's rotten old voice.

I disregarded Camicazi's urging to stay back and went to the very edge of the treeline, keeping my body low, yet my head raised enough to see my target.

Mildew stood several paces away, banging his staff against a large metal door of some sort. Sparks flew up in the air every time the wood hit metal. He cursed the sky and the heavens with every breath. He wanted to get in, that's what I knew. He clearly came here for what was behind the door, but what was inside?

I shook my head, deciding it was unimportant. I had my target. Stormfly took up a position nearby, as did Camicazi. We all gave each

other one silent look as we crept forward. The old man was too busy, yelling at the door for refusing to budge.

Camicazi was the closest, sword in hand. I was the next closest, since I wanted the old man at my mercy with Stormfly following behind as my back up. We all stayed silent, not even breaking a twig on the way as we approached. Soon, we would have the old man in our grasp and I would do away with one of my greatest threats.

Camicazi moved within range to perform a lunge. She looked back at me, wanting to know if she had my permissionâ€¦ I think. Odd, she never did that before. Then again, this was my enemy we were about to take down.

I nodded. If Camicazi took down my foe for me, I wouldn't get as much satisfaction, but I'd still have his head.

Camicazi nodded and then made her attack. She made a lunge, sword pointed to stab the old man in the backâ€¦ It went through himâ€¦ too well.

Camicazi's sword struck Mildew, but the old man practically seemed to dissolve into vapor as the blade past through him.

Stormfly and I jumped in surprise. What just happened? Was it some sort of trick? Our questions were soon answered as bolts of lightning came and struck us. I yelped in pain and panicky searched the area for our attacker.

"Thought you could sneak up on me, didja?" Mildew bellowed, letting out more lightning, but from where, I couldn't tell. How did he manage to sneak up on us? How did he even know we were here?

Camicazi rolled and took cover behind a nearby rock. "Up there!" she shouted, pointing up onto the mountain.

I saw Mildew standing dozens of feet above us, letting his height advantage give him more reachâ€¦ and leaving us exposed. He burst out more lightning, but this time Stormfly and I leapt away and into the skies with a jump.

"I'll kill you!" I screamed and began to draw fire into my chest. I would have wanted to crush him under my claws and teeth, but burning him to death meant he would die by my hand, figuratively. I let the power build up inside me, getting stronger as I wanted to make sure nothing of the old fool remained.

He raised his staff andâ€¦ no lightning shot out.

I didn't consider what it was he did in that moment, thinking that it was just my lucky day. But as I tried to unleash my Breath to destroy him, I felt the power I gatheredâ€¦ evaporating, as if it burned away into nothingness. Quite quickly, I realized that the spell that the old man had wrought was far worse than any lightning.

I felt my limbs weaken, my body growing cold as the fire inside my chest disappeared like the Breath I tried to summon. I didn't realize or understand what happened up until I felt my scale transfigure itself back into woven cloth; I was human againâ€¦ and in the air. In

a panic, I tried to cover my head with the cowl, yet nothing happened; I remained a boy. Somehow, somehow, Mildew had undone the spell that was in my grandfather's cloak! And that left me a boy without wings with only momentum keeping me going forward.

Mildew laughed in an ugly cackle. "Ha, this is how things _should be_, dragon! You should never have flown!"

I tried again to make my cloak work, but nothing happened yet again. Lacking other options I tried to pretend my arms were still wings, hoping that I would have the ability to _not _crash into the mountain.

Mildew laughed harder

"Toothless!" I heard both Stormfly and Camicazi both yell, but Stormfly was nearer and diverting her course towards me in a move to intercept me.

"I'll get you!" she screamed.

"Please do!" I yelled. I really didn't like my odds. The Nadder's speed rose fast as her wings beat her forward faster than my momentum kept me sailing towards my doom. Soon, she was going to be in grabbing range and would snatch me away from my demise.

But Mildew didn't quite like me getting saved at the last moment. "Oh, no you don't!" he barked and then from his staff came a gust of wind so intense that I felt it push me in the other direction, away from the mountain.

Stormfly tried to grab me with my sudden change of direction, but her talons weren't fast enough. I was sent barreling past her, the old man's gust of wind carrying me like was a speeding boulder from a catapult. Unlike a boulder though, I knew I was so fragile.

Mildew's laugh and my screaming were the only things I could hear.

And then blackness.

52. Chapter 52

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I suppose if there was an upside to my capture, it was that I wasn't forced into being put into that scrawny, skinny body that was forced upon me. I was a proud Nightmare through and through. I could go stride through their village without being bothered or accosted for expressing myself. I may have not liked being in my position, but I do know that there was a proper time and place to vent.

But just traveling through the place unnerve me. Listening to all of these smaller, inferior creatures speaking amongst themselves with all of the same energy and chitter chatter that I would expect from my own Kin was odd; animals, beasts shouldn't have this much complexity, yet the Herd did. It was so wrong on a very fundamental level. I wish that assuming my trueshape would have prevented me

fromâ€¦ listening to them.

I continued forward through the village, walking my way past intersections and pathways. This place was nothing but a confusing, sprawling maze and I figured I had little else to do than get myself acquainted. I was not going to become a fool and find myself asking for helpâ€¦ and I wanted to be as far away from my new Flight Commander.

At this hour, the Herd were slowly removing themselves from theâ€¦ streets, moving back into their Dens and preparing their dinners. Everything was more bearable with less voices to assault me with their annoying, grating prattle. There was only so much I could listen to Herd negotiating business.

And then I noticed something odd in the slowly thinning streets. I saw what appeared to be a small family of Gronckles, bearing a parental unit and then with some small hatchlings by the parents. It was strange because I was fairly sure that the Flight didn't have any young or parents when we were captured. Our Lord's rules prohibited the exceptionally young and their parents from serving the Flights, so where did these Kin come from? Were they the results of a previous abduction? We might not have been the only group of Kin held against our will, come to think of it; during my aimless wandering, I noticed at least a dozen other Kin that were not present during that stupid and unlawful naming ceremony.

I sighed. Whatever. Not my problem. Our Flight Commander was heinous, no doubt, but I had more important things to worry about. I began turning my body to go off the opposite direction. I didn't need to speak to these Kin, no need to even greet them; after all, they were probably not important enough if I never heard of them until my own capture.

But then, just as I turned, one of the little Kin up ahead quickly turned its head over to my direction. The small whelp bounded forward until it was right up in my face.

I jerked my head away, stopping the little hatchling from leaping up onto my face. "Hey, watch it!" I cried.

But the stupid child was far too young to be controlled by words; it probably didn't even understand. It-he cawed, making noises that made no sense. Baby talk. He tried to jump, trying to use its small, underdeveloped wings to catch more air.

"Go away!" I lifted my wing and gently moved the little Kin away several Herd feet.

It didn't deter him. He bounced and leapt onto my wing.

"Hey! Stop that! Ow-" Annoying brat. I tried to shake him off, but the little whelp's teeth were already digging into my membranes. Gah! His jar strength and tiny teeth were far too weak to actually harm me, but it was annoying and certainly painful. Gronckle young I know from experience tended to have painful jaw strength.

The parents yelped, once they realized that one of their children had moved away quickly rushed over, followed by the other, far less daring children.

"Get your child off me," I demanded them, once they came close. I would have probably struggled harder, but my Flight Commander would have no doubt punished me for it if I did.

"Come here, baby!" the child's mother called out, extending her wings to receive the child.

The little whelp let out a happy, shrill noise. His little teeth let go of my wing and the rambunctious infant darted off into his mother's wings. She wrapped the hatchling in her hold, in that way that only the most patient of mothers could manage and thankfully off of me. "Children!"

The father seemed to laugh, nervously. "Well, he's a bit of a scamp. Braves of the bunch."

"It's normal, at that age," I muttered. I saw the other whelpings standing behind the parents, all rather timid and afraid of the world around them, especially me as they should be. However, I knew that it was only a matter of time before they all ended up like their brother, the chaotic early bloomer of the litter. At that point, no one, not even my King really has any control over them at least when it's not dinner time at any rate. There was probably six of them all told. "You'll have your talons full in no time," I mused.

"Oh, really?" said the father, almost sounding a little unsure, afraid. "Well, that's one more thing to watch out for I guess."

I scowled. How could he not really know that? It was the norm for the young to be rather active. Perhaps he was the result of a bad or atypical upbringing; a certain Night Fury came to mind. I shook my head. The young were not my problem, though I did wonder where my Flight Commander took all of these Kin from. I narrowed my eyes. "Say, from what Enclave do you hail from?"

"Enclave?" said the female. She stopped licking the rambunctious whelp in her wings, causing him to look up in surprise. "Uh, what do you mean by that?"

"Uh, we don't come from any of them, uh, Enclaves, lady," said the male, his voice quaking. "We don't know any."

I blinked. These Kin were not from any Enclave? In fact, they don't know any. That was impossible. Even the smallest islands at least spoke to whatever local powers were nearby. No one, except for the most isolated and outcast, were that ignorant, and even then...

"Uh, lady?" called out the father. "You alright?"

I shook my head. Fine, whatever, they were completely ignorant. "Ugh, then where do you hail from?"

"Uh, we're locals," said the male.

"Yeah, lived here all our lives before."

I blinked. Wait, they lived among the Herd all their lives? How was that possible, unless? Suddenly, I came to realize that the few samplings of Herd becoming Kin was just only the tip of an iceberg.

The reason I had never heard of a small population of Kin amongst the Herd before now was self explanatory; they were not my Kin. But how could this be? How were such things possible without my King's intervention and blessing?

"Is there a problem?"

"No," I replied, shaking free from my thoughts once again.

"Oh," said the male. "So, uh, you're one of those special kids who can change back and forth right? We heard you came along a while back."

"Sort of," I replied dryly. It wasn't my choice and my brother had more or less forced me into the world these creatures held. I can't believe I was seriously having a conversation with twoâ€¦ changed Herd. Figures. No proper Kin among them. I eyed the small whelps, seeing them for what they were. "What stops you from returning to your-" I was about to say "lesser forms" but I decided to be polite. "-true forms?"

"They tried to fashion a means and other tricks," said the male.

"But by the time a means was able to undo the spell, wellâ€¦"

The mother and father pair eyed the children, the look of their eyes semi-self explanatory. Someone had to raise the children, even if they were annoying. That wasâ€¦ admirable if a little too stereotypical for Gronckles. Perhaps the first, truly noble thing I heard of the Herd doing. But they were still far below me, I shouldn't forget.

"Lots of males and female chose to stayâ€¦" the male's voice trailed off.

"Kin," I filled in.

"Kin," he finished. "We're the Blackhorns, by the way. Well, we don't have hornsâ€¦ and aren't black, but it's what ourâ€¦ Den name is?"

I nodded. "You may call me Firewyrms." For now. I had no intention sticking to that name for the rest of my life. What was it with the Herd insisting on naming everything even their Dens?

"Fwriwm!"

I knelt down and saw the little, rambunctious Gronckle trying to stutter what might have been my name. He butchered it terribly, his vocal cords still far too undeveloped for proper speech. "Cute," I muttered. Still an annoying brat, but cute.

The mother smiled. "They grow up fast, faster than I'd have thought."

I mused on that. He and his siblings looked normal for their age, I mean, it was only mid Spring; the mating festival wasn't too far away. "There's nothing wrong," I said. Then again, maybe Herd young had different growth rates, like some Breeds of Kin did. I know Night Furies took forever to fully matureâ€¦ Maybe it was the result of

them being essentially hatched as Kin or maybe something even earlier.

It was then when we realized that the sun had set, lighting the sky up with faint red during dark.

"My, would you look at the time?" said the male.

The female moved away from her special needs youngling and turned toward the far more obedient others. "Come on little ones; it's time for din-dins and then bed time."

The little dragons all barked with excitement, even though they probably only had the vaguest idea of what their mother was saying; her voice was the only thing they needed to know to know comfort would be provided. I knew what was going through their heads...

"See you another time, Miss Firewrym?" called out the father.

"Maybe," I replied. I had no intention of following up on that, did I?

We separated.

I went back to my Host's Den, mostly to avoid any further encounters with false Kin. I didn't need to run into any more of them, not right now; too many questions that I didn't want to ask. Besides, it was impolite to keep my Host waiting for meal times and I do pride myself on being at least respectful to those who matter as much as I hate the rule I had to be human around the dinner table.

I battered my tail against the front door, that unusual greeting that the Herd did to get attention. I didn't understand why they didn't just leave doors unlocked, Kin Dens didn't need doors at all. If there were trespassers in your domain it was your to be rid of them. If they took something from you while you were away, you sniff them out and attack them. If you can't find them or defeat them, well, that was your fault for being inept.

After battering my tail against the wood a few more times, the door finally opened to show my Host, Snotlout's father. It was his domain, his table, rules. He was a traditional Viking warrior, slew many of my Kin and proud of it, and of an important Brood if I am understanding things correctly. Over all, I knew he was an enemy, though I couldn't help but respect that, murderer and all. "Oh, you" he muttered.

"Me." I smirked and stepped forward. He was the equivalent of an infamous and deadly animal in my eyes. Worthy of a little grudging respect. As dishonorable as it was, I decided I like taking advantage of that when I could, not bothering to tell him who I really was.

He narrowed his eyes as I stepped through the home's threshold. "Dinner's going to be late" he muttered. I must have gave him an obvious to identify look, because he sighed and continued. "You'll see what I mean" Hmph, you have it so easy you know..." And he stepped outside, closing the door.

I kept moving forward, wondering what it was I was supposed to see. Something must have happened while I was away. Now that I thought about it, I think he must have been rather upset over something. Did my useless brother do something again?

I sniffed the air. Nothing's burning and the only blood that I could smell belonged to last night's meal. So, I don't know what went wrong. Did the runt finally manage to tick off our Host?

I crept slowly through the building, intent on getting ready for supper. Hopefully my brother can make himself useful and put on my restraints since Snotlout was for some unfathomable reason unable to place it upon me.

I was interrupted from my thoughts by a faint voice that I could barely hear, Snotlout's I think. He was talking to himself, that much I could, but the context and the meaning was all lost. I decided to drop by his corner of the Den and investigate, wondering if he was the root of his father's woes.

I saw him sitting on his bed. not a moment later. He held up a small reflective in a position that made me think he looking right at it. He placed a candle close to the disk, bathing himself in its flickering lights. He muttered to himself, still mostly unintelligible, but at least I could tell he was obviously speaking to himself and sometimes piece together half of what he was saying.

"...can't hide anymore"

"...wanted to"

"...not looking forward to"

Unfortunately, I couldn't make it out. Maybe if I was a Night Fury, but no, I had no intent of bein in that confusing Broodline. Besides, I preferred the more direct approach. I was not going to hide not when I could be seen. "Snotlout," I called.

Startled, the male dropped his disc and for some reason put both hands over his face. He slowly turned his head over to me. "Firewrym?" he called.

"Is something wrong?" I asked. Not worried. Why would I be over something that doesn't matter? Obviously.

"Uh, sort of" he uttered. "You'll think it's silly."

I rolled my eyes. He was already plenty silly in my eyes, especially with him trying to cover his face for some reason. Did he get into a fight or something. "Try me," I said.

"Alright" he didn't sound so sure, but Snotlout removed his hands from his face. A small coat of scales covered an entire cheek and his eye seemed halfway one color, half another. Some teeth were jagged, far too sharp for anything human, but certainly more like my own.

"You're changing, " I guessed. That certainly explained why his father was rather displeased. I actually found myself being rather

pleased by this turn of events. He might not have been a proper Nightmare, but at least tried. A curious grin sprang from my mouth.

"Only when I get hurt," said the male, touching his face. "I don't my changes aren't going as fast as Astrid's. It's already taken too long."

My now that was interesting. A day or two ago, my Flight Commander was slowly transitioning out of Herd form and adopting a Nadder's shape. Apparently, Snotlout's return to Nightmaredom was not going to work the same way, but I felt that maybe I could help it along. "Then why not just hurt yourself and be done with it?"

The male looked at me, his eyes wide and his lips quivering with a question. Was he going to ask me to help speed him along I wonder. "Uhâ€|no?"

"No?" I questioned. "Why not? Surely being Kin was better than being stuck in a transitional form. I recall you enjoyed it."

The male frowned. I knew my words hit true. "It's not worth it," he said.

I squinted my eyes at the male. Not worth it? How was greatness not worth it? He was lying to me, I knew it! Hm, I had a few idea, but nothing in particular stuck out.

"You won't understand!" he said, responding to my questioning looks. "Please, not right now..."

I let out a puff of smoke. Fine, if he was not going to answer me. One question remained. "So, then what hurt you?"

The male's eyes widened and I saw them moving back and forth as if to formulate something behind them. "I. Uhâ€| If the twins tell you that when I wanted to get some dragon's blood, that the dragon I picked apparently had a phobia of his own blood and went crazy, they're lying! No, it was an epic battle and they know it!"

I laughed.

* * *

><p>Where was Skullcrusher?<p>

He was supposed to be here by now, waiting for _me_ to arrive, not the other way around. It was after all his idea to meet up in the middle of some secluded sinkhole on the island, all because he wanted to convey to me the _full extent_ of how badly I was going to be crushed. I sighed. I really hope he's just tardy, because it would be just my luck for him to be intercepted. Who know how powerful and all seeing the King was now?

In what felt like a timeless eternity, I finally saw the silhouette of a large and powerfully built dragon descending into the pit. Skullcrusher finally arrive. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Hiccup," he called. "I was held up."

I frowned, though not exactly at the dragon himself. "Held

up?"

Skullcrusher seemed to raised his shoulders for a shrug; hard to tell with quadrupedal bodies. "Don't worry about it; I'll explain later."

"You do know that that's only going to cause me to wonder about that even more right?" I pointed out.

The dragon grinned. "Oh, you're going to have plenty other things to worry about instead."

"Gee. Thanks!" I said with much sarcasm. "More worry, exactly what I needed." I shook my head. "Justâ€¦ tell me, how bad is it?" I recall a little bit of our talk last night, or really early morning, back when Skullcrusher warned me that things were going to get a whole lot worse. All signs pointed to one very obvious and troubling fact.

"When the King gets free," Skullcrusher said gravely. It wasn't a possibility, not any more; it was what was going to happen. "He will come after either you or the Usurper, that much I know."

I frowned. The King was powerful, magically and physically. He could crush armies with his sheer scale alone and the only thing that held him from doing what he wanted sooner were the last decaying vestiges in his prison. I've spent the past day mulling over the details and playing out scenarios in my head. None of the results were good. But then I latched onto something the Rumblehorn brought up, something he didn't tell me until just now. "The Usurper?" Did he mean Alvin? "Why go after him?"

"To secure his rule," said the dragon. "It's quite clear that the King has some sort of personal stake upon you, probably something to do with your mother. The Usurper is a bigger, more political concern, as is fitting for his title."

I nodded. Right, the King didn't see me as a threat, otherwise he'd have been more aggressive when dealing with me. Alvin must have been a bigger problem since I hear he's been stirring trouble amongst the dragons. Though, I really don't understand why he's called the Usurper. Is he trying to claim the King's titles or something? One thing was for sure, I'll have to deal with him later. "So then what do we do?"

The dragon shook his head yet again. "No, it's what you are going to do that matters; _I _am only here to insure you would be ready to actuallyâ€¦ do these things."

I blinked. So, he came all this way to warn me of the dangers I would face and not to actually help me with any them? "Great," I moaned. "So how am I supposed to stop him? He's bigger than me _and _probably can call on more forces to defend himself rather than attack!" There was a reason I felt like an insect in front of the titanic dragon that everyone called King and that was simply due to the fact that relatively speaking, _I was an insect in comparison._ Facing the King was going be like asking if a fly or an ant stood a chance against my Dad.

The dragon shrugged. "That's your problem. I'm only the

messenger."

I sighed. One of the few allies I had outside of the Vikings and he was just relaying someone else's message. "Whose?"

"You'll find out," promised the dragon. "But for now, there's one other message I have to give you."

He opened his mouth and for a split second, I thought he was going to warn me of some other dangers. Instead, I found myself leaping out the way as a large column of flame came out from his mouth. "Hey!" I barked in surprise. "You could really hurt someone with that!"

The dragon laughed. "Ha! Don't be afraid! I know you can take it!"

"I am not-" I would have referred to Baldur yet again, but then I remembered that that wasn't someone dragons knew about or had a name for in their language. Maybe there was an equivalent or other mythological figure I could name that was supremely invulnerable, but I didn't know that many. It also helped that I had to jump out of the way of Skullcrusher as he made a lumbering charge. "I don't want to fight you!" I backed away and out his path. He zoomed past me and smashed into the cliffside.

"Too bad," he said, pulling himself from the rubble. "This time, I do!"

In panicked reflex I blasted him with a plasma blast.

The dragon shielded himself with his wing, taking visible damage, but mostly minor. "Gotta do more than that kid!" He stomped a foot on the ground and readied for another charge.

With trembling energy running through me, I did a quick look around, trying to formulate a response or some way to bring him down. All I could really see around me was the pond in one corner and then an idea formed.

I jumped out of the way of the dragon's attack, this time with slightly less clearance than last time, but still enough to make my response. As I leapt, out of the way, I aimed a blast down towards the dragon's underbelly, realizing that compared to the rest of his hardened body, it was the point where his scales were the thinnest. The dragon's lower body bounced into the air with a jolt, the force of my attack sending it slightly out of sync with the rest of his body. He took very little damage from that explosion, but I didn't need it; I saw I had an opening.

I lobbed another blast at the dragon's rear, this time causing him to jerk off course with his charge by a smidge and move several paces in his new direction. I repeated that attack, sending him forward even more, again and again. My attacks might not do as much damage as they could have if I had taken the time to actually pour more of plasma into them, but they still had enough force to move the dragon.

By the time Skullcrusher brought the lower half of his body to the ground and was slowly regaining control of his movement, he was right in position. He laughed, not realizing my plan. "What was that all

about? That-"

I didn't let him finish his sentence. This time, it was my turn to charge him, aiming my body at his sides. He might have been bigger and stronger than me overall, I just needed the right opportunity and circumstances to be more powerful than him for just one second, an opportunity as him cracking a joke.

My body contacted him and while all of his feet were on the ground, his posture wasn't braced to withstand my attack. He and I both fell into the pond, creating a splash.

I don't know how deep we both went, but I know I was the first one to surface. I crawled onto the mostly dry ground and shook myself free of water, like a dog. Gah, what I wouldn't give to be able to use a towel myself.

Skullcrusher came out after me, giving me a annoyed look as he climbed out. He wheezed and spat out water.

"Don'tâ€¦do that!" I choked out.

Skullcrusher's expression twisted into a pleased smile. "I had to do. Had to make sure you'd be ready to fight."

"So, your message was that you wanted to pick a fight! Gee, and here I thought you'd want me to pound my head against a rock." I grimaced and set my head down. Skullcrusher might have caught me off guard and started something, but I knew he didn't go all out, our fight when the King was watching us was more involved, with both of us giving it our all. This was just a short spar and the Rumblehorn didn't put as much of a fight as I slowly knocked him into the pond.

The dragon snorted. "Don't be ungrateful, kid. You aren't ready yet."

"Will I ever be ready?" I asked, my head still stuck to the ground. Unlike Skullcrusher, the King wouldn't hold back if we ever came to blows, of that I was sure of. "He's far more powerful than I am."

Skullcrusher laughed, as if listening to a hilarious joke. Probably my whole life, but his words said a different message. "Kid, you don't have to be stronger than the King to beat him; I know that much. Besides, sometimes it pays to be the little guy!"

I raised my head and narrowed my eyes, skeptical. "So you mean to tell me that I _don't _need to overpower a dragon that could flatten my whole village by himself?" I guess I could try to outsmart what was the closest thing to a god I knew, but how was I going to do that when a small chunk of his power lurked within me, seeing everything?

The dragon's smile only grew. "I've been told you got a good head on your shoulders, but that's not what's holding you back?"

I _really _wanted to know what gave him so much certainly that I could rise to challenge the King. To him, it sounded like I already had the means necessary to defeat a dragon thousands of times bigger than me. How was _that _even possible? I sighed, not liking not

knowing. "So if I _could _defeat the King-" as impossible as it sounded "-what's stopping me?"

Suddenly it looked like the wind was taken out of Skullcrusher's wings, optimism being traded away for cynicism. "Let me ask you one question."

"What question?" I doubted I had the option to refuse.

"How willing are you to kill one of us?"

My eyes widened. What kind of question was that? And what did he mean that I'd have to kill a dragon? Iâ€¦ don't think I can do that. Toothless was the one who had the mindset to do that sort of thing; I'mâ€¦ not. "What do you mean? How does that mattered"

He shook his head, as if trying to deny something. "Because, kid, the only way I see you coming out of this alive involves you killing the King."

****Astute readers may notice a significant difference between the changes Astrid and Snotlout endured and might be able to discern its importance.****

53. Chapter 53

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

The struggle within my own head felt like it came to a stalemate. I wanted to think of myself as Kindred, yet in my heart I knew that was not true. Words are still confusing, mixes of two wholly separate tongues. I remembered my life as a young _girl_, about my goal of proving myself the best in the village; at the same time, I recall small snippets of a life that never was, about a young Nadder who sought to become a Flight Commander, one that had later grown and achieved it; I almost believed it all.

It was an odd peace, one that I wasn't sure if I was quite comfortable with. I felt like my King- the Red Death'sâ€¦ programming had stopped advancing, stopped breaking away at my own mind. Yet, I wasn't too sure if it had truly stopped or if this was just a small lapse in his spell. Should I let my guard down only to have myself devoured? No, I should-

"Astrid?" The voice snapped me from my trance.

When I saw the origin on the voice, I blurted out. "Hiccup?" When did he get here?

The Night Fury yawned, tired from another night staying up. "Are you okay?"

"I am fine!" I grunted. I really hoped he would not turn into one of those overly protective males. "My name might mean I look nice, but I am not fragile!"

Hiccup flashed me a weary grin. "Just, checking, you've been busy standing looking down at the river for a while."

I looked down and found myself staring face first into the village's river at the perfect angle to see my own reflection; I looked good, I knew that much, but why did my appearance look so wrong? I splashed my foot into the water and the ripples destroyed the image. I'd rather not deal with that right now. "Like you're one to talk; you've been staying up all night again. You didn't even return home last night!"

Hiccup gave me another weary grin. "I've had alot to think about," he yawned.

"I can imagine," I muttered. I had to wonder which of us probably has the worst deal, having abducted parents who will fight against you and being forced to being Kin again or being Kin while second guessing your own identity while having to manage a Flight; I couldn't decide between those awful fates. I shook my head. "You busy?"

The Night Fury frowned. "Sort of."

I narrowed my eyes. "Sort of?"

The Night Fury nodded, his expression filled with apparent sadness. It made him look sympathetic enough to curb my urge to rake at him. "There's an Emergency Tribal Council meeting today," he bowed his head. "... It's finally run out."

I just stared at him, realizing what he just he just said.

Before I can say anything, he answer. "So, yay us! More Kin to take care of!" his tone was obviously displeased.

I sighed. As if a hundred Kin was enough. The spell that held several of the Herd from turning back was failing. Not good. Not good at all. "How bad?"

"Bad enough to hold an emergency Tribal Council meeting," said the Night Fury, shaking his head. "I only stopped to check up on you! But I gotta get going!" He then started to dart off into a sprint.

I raised a wing. "See me afterwards, Hiccup!" I might have not liked that he was leaving, but something this important needed his attention. Wish I could have come.

The Night Fury turned back to look at me before he was completely out of my reach. "Love you, too!" The, he took wing.

I smiled. At the very least, I could think of Hiccup as Hiccup. Even if all of my other faculties became compromised, I think I'd be just be fine if I could still remember what he really looked like, behind the dark scales.

Of course, I would prefer if my head was completely devoid of any tampering. I had half a mind to go ask the Night Fury to make some sort of attempt to dispel the enchantment upon me, even if it involved one of those special bolts he still has lying around. That won't happen for a number of reasons; Hiccup would say it was too dangerous because when those bolts found themselves used upon him, well, I got wound up in my current mess. Second, I don't know

if I wanted to take the "easy way out"; I wanted to overcome my King's spellâ€¦ though I had to wonder if that urge have been part of his spell to begin with.

Regardless, I knew I had something to do. If Hiccup was going to be dealing with a sudden expansion of the Flight, I had to make sure my Flight was ready for it.

I took wing and made my way towards the outskirts of the village. Due to rising complaints, I was forced to move my Flight further away from the heart of the village, letting them settle on that treasonous filth that cursed me into this form early. He wasn't here any longer and I felt that that having his lands transferred to me was a reasonable...compensation. So, my Flight took over.

I saw my Kin hobbling along in the grounds below. Whatever fields the old man had tilled for himself were trampled underneath their feet, crushing many of the wheat and grain; his flocks were divided to other, more deserving Herd, leaving none to my Flight.

Several noticed me, letting out cries and salutes. "Flight Commander!" many of my Kin spoke, their tones sounding surprised.

I smirked. At least they knew to respect my authority. However, I knew better than to land there; no doubt my Kin would have a thousand questions for me, they've been in the village long enough to wonder and think. And they'd have plenty more soon enough. Instead, I needed to delegate.

I scanned the area, looking for my current and only Knight. I found who I was looking for, situated near the remnants of my enemy's Den. I would have burned his possessions and destroyed it, but I knew Hiccup might have need of them eventually.

I descended towards the building, just in time to overhear a conversation coming from within.. "I am not drinking that!" I heard Fishlegs cry. "It'll kill me! Or worse!"

"Hey! Look at it this way; If it doesn't work you won't have to worry about any of those things, heck you won't have to worry about anything anymore!" That was Snotlout. No doubt attempting to administer Fishlegs's treatment since obtaining resources yesterday proved to beâ€¦ problematic. Still, I can't believe I'm saying this, but I envied that Snotlout's position; for some reason, only Hiccup and I "degraded" so quickly, he didn't

"Because I'll be dead!" I heard the sound of metal clanging against itself, I think pots and pans.

I found Meatlug right outside the threshold, looking inside a nervous expression upon her face. "Please be safe, please be safe," I heard her mutter.

As I neared her, I saw that several of my Kin come near me, giving me wanting, needy looks. They stayed silent, for now. From being the Gronckle, I pretended to cough, drawing her attention to me.

She jumped from a standing position. "Oh! Astrid! Uh, I didn't see you there! Sorry!"

I nodded, accepting the apology. "What's the status of my Flight?" I asked. I knew that I could go the direct route and ask the commoners behind me, but I had a Knight to report to me.

"Uh," the Gronckle hesitated, so uncertain. "Well, everything's fine, but there's been some problemsâ€¦"

I nodded again. I didn't expect things to be perfectly smooth, I after all went out onâ€¦ dates with a risk taker who liked to improvise his way out of danger. "Perhaps, you should tend to them?" I suggested.

"Uhâ€¦" Meatlug's mouth hung open, her gaze fixated into the inside of the building.

Of course, she was distracted; she cared deeply for Fishlegs and what happened to him. Her concerns were not unwarranted, especially when things like- "Heh, maybe you will turn into a Fireworm, or a Scauldron, hate to be one of those all the way up here, nowhere near any water..." -coming from within. I didn't fault Meatlug for caring; I was in this mess to begin with because I cared.

But I needed herâ€¦ and she needed to stop paying attention for just a moment. I stepped in front of Meatlug's vision, keeping her from looking. "Are there any issues that I should know about?"

The Gronckle's gaze tried to look past me, but it was no use. She looked at me with nervous eyes. "Well, I heard from Falling Trees that he's rather missing his parents..." Hopefully, if I got her started on working, she could avert her attention from Fishlegs for until Snotlout finished with him.

"I do!" wailed the Kin behind me.

"I do!" said _his other head._ He was named Falling _Trees _because well, Zipplebacks areâ€¦ weird. Honestly I think Barf and Belch are the normal ones.

"And me!" this time said a different Kin.

"And me!" sounded another.

I shook my head. Right. Most of my Flight was rather young, maybe my apparent age. Conscription rules more or less favored the young and in their prime would be drafted. "None of you are leaving!" I ordered, causing my Kin to step down in fear. I stuck my tongue out. I hated that I had to force them, but it was either that or killing or banishing them to prevent them from speaking with my form- no, _never-had-once-been_ King. "Next?" I asked of Meatlug.

Meatlug nodded. "And then, there's the issue with Toes-in-Mouth constantly being afraid of wellâ€¦"

"We're all going to be flattened!" screamed aâ€¦ was that a yellow Terror? "Stepped on, crushed!"

I sighed. I imagine that this might have been a "small Kin" thing, being soâ€¦ tiny and all. I certainly didn't fear getting stepped on, but small Kin always had to be wary of the larger Kin. "We won't," I said. "Theâ€¦ Herd are simply far too small to harm us."

The little Kin shook his head. "No, no!" he barked. "I mean, what if one of the rogues got to us?!"

Suddenly, the rest of my Flight turned silent, as though the concerns that the one little Kin became their own. "Who?" I questioned. Just who were these rogues and why should I be afraid. Brief images of raiders at sea flashed into my mind, bandits, brigands, and other unappealing fiends; I think that might have been the _Red Death's_ spell trying to explain concept to me; not sure.

The little Kin flew up to the tallest Kin's head, roosting himself above us all as if to lift up his own cause. "The Great Island sinker, the Hungering Jaws!" shouted the little Kin. "He whose teeth can shred mountains and whose might could break islands!"

I squinted. Wait, what? There were more Kin on the King's level? And here I thought one such behemoth was enough!

"Only our Lord's power and armies removed him from our seas, now we lack his protection!" declared another Kin. The silence that had befallen my Flight had ended, replaced by a panic and frightened uneasiness. Even I was swept up by the tale.

All, except my Knight seemed anxious. I saw Meatlug stand up, rolling her eyes. "None have seen him in an age. Our grandparents's grandparents's grandparents were not yet eggs!" she sounded. The panic around my Flight settled, but only enough that Kin were not taking to the skies in paranoia.

I let out squawk. Even factoring how fast Kin reproduced, the Hungering Jaws wasâ€| old, ancient even. I really doubt he survived.

The little Terror did a bow. "But Lady Knight!" he squealed. "What of the others? Like the Doomfang and its frozen death fires!"

"And the Heart Stealer and how its touch alone could turn your fire to black and your mind to a husk!" shouted another.

"Or of the Brighten Colossus and how it lived within molten earth and ate other Kin!"

"They're out there!" said one last Kin. "Without protection, we would all be doomed!"

Panic might broke out again, but this time I intervened. "I really doubt that." As my Flight began listing out names of Kin, I never heard before, I kind of put together who these rogues were. They were like the stories I learned when I was a little girl. Individuals who were powerful, noteworthy, who while they might have been realâ€| might kind of be a little exaggerated or at least kind of indifferent to pretty much anyplace that was outside their holdings. I mean, how often does Thor come around Berk? I turned to Meatlug, wondering if my guess was correct.

The Gronckle broke into a grin. "Well, first off, the Doomfang might have been poisoned to death." Okay, so he's real, but dead. "Heart Stealerâ€| had her heart stolen if I remember correctlyâ€| and gave birth to Changewings and that was a _really_ _long_ time ago." So

pretty much ancient history and likely died of old age. "And the Bright Colossus has a really specific dietâ€¦" So, unlikely to attack and eat us.

"But Lady Kni-" The other Kin rose and began to plead, but they were cut off.

"Hey!" she barked. "I was a bard for most of my life; I know our stories and histories better than other Knights! Those rogues are not coming!"

My Kin crumpled to the ground in submission.

I smiled. Good job, Meatlug, you've managed to defuse the situation. And thankfully, you avoided thinking of Fishlegs for a while. "See, there's no rogues that will att-"

"Now, if you really want to know who to be scared of, you'll need to think about the Mad Wanderer!" Meatlug roared, causing my Flight to fall dead silent at the mention of that title.

Okay, I take that back, Meatlug made the situation worse. At best, I hoped that she'd scare everyone so badly that they _don't _leave. "Uh Meatlug you may-"

She didn't answer me, wrapped up spinning the story. "You might of known him. The Mad Wanderer is a selfish rogue that had lived for centuries! Some say he's even older than our King!"

I gulped. Okay, yeah, he sounds like bad news.

"He is the one Kin that our Lord has failed time and time again to even notice, even when his territories are disturbed!" cried Meatlug. "Some say that our Lord is too afraid, but others like myself say he can't even _know _he exists."

Okay, that's odd. One Kin that the King can not seem acknowledge existed? That's crazy. How did that even work? Was the King blind to him somehow? Or maybe the simply chooses not to get involved.

"He travels everywhere, his destination and goals completely unknown. If anyone gets in his way, he slays them! Generation after generation, Flight Commanders choose to pursue him; but few can follow after him for long and no one may ever ambush himâ€¦. at least not most of the time. For you see, one night every ten years, when the sky lights up with fires that dance-"

Wait. Was Meatlug talking about who I thought she was talking about? A single, haphazard word came to mind, one signifying the Kin, no dragon, that had been the bane of my existence and one of the reason I took up an axe in the first place.

"And when the rivers glow, reflecting that light, the Mad Wanderer, the Nightmare appears," Meatlug spoke solemnly. "Many brave warriors perished under him throughout the ages, even Flight Commanders and Knightly escortsâ€¦"

"And my uncle," I added in. My headache stopped. I felt so calm, focused, and determined saying it. For a moment, it felt like the King's spell had no hold on me. My Kin, the dragons, all stood to

attention, hearing the reason why they should care about a lowly beast. "He died standing against him. Fearless Finn was his name and I plan to avenge him."

My Flight rose, eyes locked upon me, even the yellow Terror's. "Avenge him?" questioned the small dragon.

I nodded. "Run if you want, but if the Nightmare ever wanders into our territory, I swear he'd have to go through me first. If you think the King can offer better protection from him, be my guest."

No one said anything, no one moved; not even Meatlug.

I smirked. Good, we came to an agreement. I doubted I would fight that dragon anytime soon, but I felt like it needed saying. Even among dragons, I knew a hero. And that was enough for me to keep fighting.

The silence ended when a scream came from inside the building. It was Fishlegs, obviously. "Gah, it burns!"

"Hm, I wonder how you will read books as a dragon... might take a few pages if you even try. Ah, let me get a torch and find out."

"Fish?" Meatlug dashed through the threshold and into the building. A moment after she did that, lots of noise and shouts were coming from within. Furniture was being tossed in every which way, most of it spilling out of getting hurled through windows.

"Hey!" I heard Snotlout.

Though my Kin did not understand either of the males' speech, I think the amount of chaos going within was pretty self evident. "Uh, should we do something?"

I shook my head, suppressing a laugh. It sounded like Fishlegs was going to skip straight into being Kin wasn't he? "No, but if you stick around you might get to meet my newest Knight."

* * *

><p>I felt dizzy. I don't know what happened to me, but I felt dizzy. Everything hurt, like my body would just spontaneously come apart at the seams from all the pain. I didn't even want to open my eyes and instead just go lul myself back to sleep; it'd be far less painful and all the more comforting. Besides, my bed felt so good, I practically couldn't feel it.<p>

But I knew that wasn't going to happen. I could hear the sounds of birds chirping, loud enough to give the roosters back home some competition. Ugh, I can't ignore it anymore, can I?

I slowly opened my eyes open and foundâ€¦ I wasn't back home? Strange, why was I looking up at some dirt? How did I-? Oh. Yeah. Not good at all. Suddenly, I realized the reason the birds sounded so loud was because they were singing right in front of my ear drums.

With my sleepiness slowly giving way for energized panic, I had come to realize that I was hanging upside down held maybe a dozen feet in

the air because somehow, my cloak had gotten caught in some tree's canopy. Maybe I was lucky to have come out alive instead of turning into a smear, but I really wanted to know why my luck _can't_ _have_ been a _little_ bit better.

I looked around at my surroundings, trying to figure out how to get out of this jam. As it was right now, if I struggled to free myself from the tree branches, I might pull myself completely out of the treeâ€| and that'd mean I could get sent plummeting to my death or at least breaking something. If I didn't try to get myself out, I'd either end up starving to death or my weight would eventually cause something to break and send me plummeting anyways. Yeah, not very good options.

Realizing that I still had my cloak on and it was fastened on enough that I wasn't slipping out of it, I decided to try my luck and change into a dragon. At least then the fall would be far less threatening due to my increased size and greater toughness. Unfortunately, the cloak wouldn't work. It must have still been reeling from what Mildew did to itâ€| last night. Oh, I hope my Stormfly and Camicazi were alright without me.

At the thought of my two missing friend, I felt my heart strain. I hope they survived the encounter. Maybe if they were alive, I could try calling them. "Stormfly! Camicazi! Are you out there?" I shouted. I waited a few minutes but heard no response. No good Toothless, no good.

I sighed. I was going to have to get out of this jam myself. Hm, what if I triedâ€| pulling myself toward the branches, not away from them? There were some branches nearby, big enough that maybe, maybe that plan could work.

I grabbed on to the closest branch and began pulling myself upward, scrunching my body in order to give myself a little more flexibility. It was a tight squeeze, but I guess being a stick had its advantages. I kept tugging myself tighter and tighter, but as I did so, I felt my coat offer me resistance as it tried to maintain its hold onto the branches. I knew that if I continued to struggle against its pull, I'd lose my support.

I sighed. I had no choice.

I pulled myself forward with one last tug and brought myself right side up, but in the struggle, my coat broke free of its restraints... I felt my legs dangling in the air, giving me a nauseous feeling, but I held it in. I wasn't going to fall, not while I still held on tight. I put my feet onto the closest branches that could support my weight, thankful to being able to stand again.

With the hard part out of the way, I ventured over to the tree trunk, pulling my way inwards until I was at the trunk. Now that I was no longer at risk of cracking my skull or breaking my neck against the ground, getting down seemed a whole lot less difficult and dangerous, although I knew I was trading one measure of pain for a different one. I grabbed onto the trunk and slid downwards, the grooved bark slowing down my fall as I descended. I still hit the ground with a thud, but my legs absorbed most of the impact.

I let out a relieved sigh. That was one problem taken care of out of

a mountain of woes. "Camicazi! Stormfly!" I shouted again. Still no response. My friends did not seem to be here.

I tried to use my cloak again and at best I felt my fingers twist into darkened claws. Great, so when Mildew shows up to kill me, I can ask for a manicure while I was at it. I had no ability to fly and my weapons were with the girls.

But I didn't have time to wallow about my problems, I heard a rustling in some nearby bushes. I turned to the source of the noise, not all too confident about what I would meet. I wanted to believe that it might have been my friends, but if it was, why wouldn't they answer me or help me when I called out to them?

My hunch was right. Two smallish dragons, no bigger than dogs crawled out, their maws opened wide and their eyes milky white. Two juvenile Whispering Deaths appeared right before me, observing me as I did them.

I leapt out of the way and hid behind the tree, hoping they would forget about me. I had no weapons or I lacked the strength to challenge them; plus they were at their most dangerous, the teething stage. Even if I could speak like a dragon, I doubt they'd listen or understand me; they were far too young. They have a tendency to bite anything that interested them whether it be earth, rocks, trees— hopefully not me.

I poked my head out of its hiding spot, hoping to see if the dragons were still there. Instead, I found some boreholes from where the small creatures entered into the earth. Suddenly, I realized the ground beneath my feet was giving a low rumble. Oh, right. Whispering Deaths could track prey by reading its footsteps. Perfect.

I gulped and then made my exit, running as fast in the opposite direction I could. I didn't even care that there was all sorts of low hanging branches or obstacles in my way; I ran. I turned my gaze backwards and caught a glimpse of the pair exploding out of where I once stood. I was lucky to narrowly avoid that.

I dashed forward, but that only seemed to encourage them to chase after me. The duo raced after me, eating through anything that came between us. It was a new low for me, running away from babes, but I knew better than to stick around. I had a history with Whispering Deaths after all. But the two dragons slowly caught on, the distance between us thinning.

I took a desperate action and leapt over some nearby bushes. I tumbled a few meters and landed flat on my back on rocky ground. The two dragons kept pursuing me, advancing after me behind the foliage. I really hoped this plan would work. I picked up several stones, but I didn't bother using them against some of the toughest dragons the world had to offer, and began to hurl them in random directions, hitting trees and rocks, causing all sorts of noise, not particularly loud, but certainly plenty of it.

The duo stopped, their heads darting in every which way as they listened to the noise being produced, unsure of what to do or where to go. Most dragons had sensitive hearing, to the point that loud noise could often be disorienting. This was most apparent when vikings hit their shields and was a known tactic they used against

them. However, young dragons were even more receptive to sound, especially the blind varieties, like Whispering Deaths. I might not have been able to whip up a whole lot of it to stun them, but it was enough to draw the attention away from easily distracted youngâ€¦ I just hoped they haven't yet figured out how to "see" heat yet and they couldn't tell scents apart yet.

The dragons snaked their way in opposite directions seemingly caught up trying to determine where the noises were coming from. They searched the area. I didn't even let out a sigh of relief. I held my breath, hoping not to breathe and catch their attention. They were still here. If I had stirred up enough, the chase would begin again. I had to be slow, cautious. I lifted my body out of the rocky ground, but I stopped lifting myself up when I came face to face with with an even larger set of milky white eyes.

I gulped. Of course, where there were baby dragons, chances were the parents weren't too far off. Now, parents raising the young isn't all that common among dragons, mostly preferring to let the young roam and explore for themselves, but it did happen from time to time. Like now.

The Whispering Death before me was an adult in perfect health. It was a different dragon than the one that had haunted me for all these years, the scales were a shade too dark for it. The dragon's milky white eyes seemed to glare at me. From its closed mouth, it uttered a low, hostile growl that sounded something like a mix of stone being churned togetherâ€¦ with meat.

I raised my head. "I'm unarmed! I don't mean any harm!" I said, desperately. I knew it wouldn't understand me, not unless this dragon was previously human before. I think it was maybe female? I don't know, I wasn't able to smell the difference or check more directly with its massive face right in front of my head. Maybe it was the mother?

The Whispering Death seemed undeterred, keeping its gaze locked on my eyes, almost as if she could see them. From the corner of my vision, I could see that the little hatchlings gathering close by, inching ever closer. Oh, great. I forgot about them when the newcomer showed up, not that it mattered at this point. The young dragon's snapped and spun their teeth in anticipation and I knew I was done for.

Then the mother slowly backed away and moved over a few feet away. The hatchlings followed her.

I stood my ground, not moving for fear of setting them off. What was going on?

Then the mother's mouth opened wide and out came what looked to be the a bloody carcass that must have been all that remained of some unfortunate deerâ€¦ hopefully a deer. The little dragons let out happy cries and prepared to dig into the meat, literally. The mother stopped them from getting closer. "No. What did I tell you about attacking the Scaleless?"

I blinked. Wait, was the mother scolding the children?

The two dragons let out little frustrated cries and hissed unintelligibly. They writhed and spun in place. In short, they were

having a tantrum.

"Don't give me those looks!" shouted the mother, for she definitely sounded like the mother. Her voice had that sort of feminine quality that probably only really made sense to those who knew it. "You could have got yourselves hurt!" Yeah, like I could have hurt them.

The duo gave a few more unintelligible fussy noises: baby talk combined with even more difficult to understand emotion. But they eventually bowed their heads.

The mother, seemingly content then pushed the hunk of what hopefully was deer meat over to her children. "Now, dig in. And next time, don't bother any Scaleless you meet!" That action seemed to make the young dragons happier. They moved towards the slab and began biting out chunks. The mother then turned to look at me, wondering if I was still here. "Go on, oh, I know you probably don't understand me, but go!"

I just put my hand to my temples, trying to decipher what just happened. I happened upon two young Whispering Deaths and was forced to flee from them. Then I ran into the mother and found myself saved from her two rampaging young before letting me go. It was like the exact opposite of that recurring nightmare I used to have, with the roles switch up. I was still the one running away, butâ€¦ everything was differentâ€¦ not that I could complain as I doubted I'd ever have a recurring nightmares from all this. Although I have to wonder what happened here?

I shook my head. Probably not worth it. It was best I left before more Whispering Deaths showed up or the two chaotic hatchlings finished their breakfast.

But as I attempted I run, I found myself falling into a pit. I landed face first in what appeared to be a dark tunnel. I rubbed my chin, trying to get the feeling back. Great, in my haste to leave, I forgot to consider whatever entrance the mother used to come here. Thankfully, the walls weren't so high up. I jumped up and slowly tried to pull myself out.

But as I did, I found myself looking into yet another pair of milky white eyes, or rather, eye; the other was long goneâ€¦ all because of me. "Again, you come," his voice was low, not even a growl.

I felt like crawling back into the tunnels, but I doubted I could escape when we were this close. I gave the dragon an awkward grin. "Uh, helloâ€¦" Unlike other dragons, I knew he would understand me; he after all was not originally a dragon.

The dragon's eyes narrowed, most likely the result of muscle memory from back when his eyes did serve a purpose. "Why do you make it a habit to disturb me, Night Fury?" his voice felt ice cold.

If Hiccup were here, maybe he'd crack a joke about it, but he wasn't. "I was just about to leave," I said. Hopefully he'd understand that I really never wanted to bother him, except for that one time I tried to kill him, but that was different. _

"Perhaps," he sounded like he already had made up his mind.

But before he could render a verdict, the female Whispering Death approached. "Husband, do you know this Scaleless? Is he one of yourâ€¦ you know what's?" I blinked. Was I hearing that right? Did she call him. No, that can't be! And now that I thought about it, why was she constantly calling me "Scaleless"? I know humans don't have scales, but I mean, most dragons called us "the Herd".

"In a way," said the male. The two young dragons approached him, unafraid. He "bent down" and rubbed his snout against those of the hatchlings. They seemed very happy to have his attention almost like... No, that was impossible. Unthinkable. Yet easily viewable.

"Oh," said the female. "Should I offer him some of the carcass? Maybe he would like some lunch!"

"Uhâ€¦ no thank you." I stutted. How did I even begin to work through this? I mean, I've lived my whole life seeing this one particular Whispering Death as being some sort of monster and night terror, and yet here I was being invited to share a meal with him. By his, no, that was impossible.

The male Whispering Death seemed a little more resigned, calmer, as if something in air around him changed. "No, that won't be necessary."

The female seemed to bow her head in disappointment. "Alright, maybe when you're done with your friend, you can play with our children."

"I will," he promised.

The female smiled and then slid down the tunnel.

I narrowed my eyes onto the male, still trying to get it all. No matter how much I didn't believe it, it actually did happen. "You're a fatherâ€¦" I said to the dragon.

The adult Whispering Death snorted. Apparently, he had chosen to forget I existed when the other dragons needed his attention so much. He almost seemed bewildered to know I was still here, as if interacting with the others took away his anger upon meeting me. "Yes," he admitted and then gently rubbed the backs of each of the smaller dragons.

The two Hatchlings coed at the touch of their father's touch, letting out pleased whimpers and satisfied yips. Two sets of milky white eyes turned to me, their teeth twisting and turning in their open jaws, though the eyes held no expression I could feel the two of them scanning me, trying to make sense of what role I played. That look they gave me, the one that practically shouted their desire toâ€¦ eat me was something out from a young Night Fury's darkest dreams. My dreams. They were beyond a shadow of a doubt his children.

54. Chapter 54

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"So, you married, uh took a mate?" I murmured. I still can't seem to shake off the odd feelings I got from this encounter. The Whispering Death, once a man named Donnar, took a dragon for a bride and well, got busy.

"It was the season, as you no doubt know about," said the dragon before me, as he eyed his children. His two young seemed to get into a minor dispute and began biting at each other with their spinning teeth, like ordinary babes really. Just a whole lot more uncontrollable. Looking at them made me feel, I don't know, strange. I wondered if maybe my brother and I might have been the same way, had things been different.

"But you did that; I mean, I thought you hated being, well, you know."

He seemed to exhale a jet of steam from his nostrils. "I do not need you to judge my decisions."

I raised my hands in surrender. "Okay, okay, not gonna!" Last thing I wanted to do was upset him enough that he would decide to take action against me. I mean, sure this time we managed to maintain some sort of a civil discussion, but who knew how long that could last? I didn't want to end up as another carcass for the little ones.

"Good," said the dragon. His two young then seemed to circle each other in some sort of chase; better them than me. He turned back to me. "Suffice it to say, there are plenty of things only the truly defeated can think to do."

"Defeated?" Last I checked, the dragon ran away before anyone could land a finishing blow. I heard a lot of people saw what happened, but no one quite knew enough of the context to actually make sense of the event except for maybe my brother. I only knew he was a member of my Mom's cursed trip and hounded me whenever we met for the past ten years. I failed to see how he could have ended up defeated? Did something happen in that fight after Hiccup threw me into the ocean? The Whispering Death scowled and I raised my hands in surrender again. "Okay, yeah, not asking that!"

The Whispering Death returned to a less hostile expression and then coiled around his young. "Why is it that whatever I do, you always seem to show up to disturb me?"

"No clue!" I shrugged. "I mean, I never plan on running into your or bothering you; you just, show up wherever I end up in." Come to think of it, it was kind of strange how I constantly kept running into the Whispering Death in the past year. I mean, there was our first meeting back when I was still a hatchling, then ten years later, he shows up as one of the dragons that my brother had the brilliant idea of freeing while we had a jailbreak from Alvin, then he shows up on the Meathead Islands just as we planned to visit, and then here. The Barbaric Archipelago was a big place; the fact we met so many times at just the right set of circumstances seemed impossible. "It is strange," I admitted.

The dragon nodded and then turned up to the heavens. "Sometimes I wonder if my life is nothing but some cruel joke played by those who live above us."

He was obviously talking about the Norse gods, the Aesir specifically. "My brother thinks the same thing," I replied. "Loki, he likes to blame, right?"

The dragon nodded and then let out a sigh. "And now, I've fallen in love with a native." Strangely, he didn't seem all too mad about that; if anything, it sounded like he was, I don't know, purring at his own thoughts.

"Yeah," I shook my head. I think the thing that scared me more than the Whispering Death and his two kids might have been his wife. She just seemedâ€¦ too nice, too impossibly nice. I was used to being chased by Whispering Deaths, a specific Whispering Death, since forever, but she was the first that didn't do that. I had to wonder how did a nice female like her end up withâ€¦ Donnar. "Say, why did she keep calling meâ€¦ 'Scaleless'? I don't think I ever heard of any dragon call humans that."

"Her ideaâ€¦" the Whispering Death said longingly. "She thought it was a moreâ€¦. respectful term given my past one."

I blinked. Okay, so, she knows about him being human and when she was talking to me about "one of his"... she might have meant other changed humans or the like. Wow, just where do dragons like her come from? She accepted him, just like that and made accommodations so easily? How did they end up together?

The Whispering Death seemed to laugh once he realized what was going on in my head. "As you can see, I've gone mad."

It was about to interject something, but instead, I had to keep lifting my feet because the two hatchlings decided to go play around me. "Hey!" They eventually stopped and return to their father, but not before nipping me several times in the legs with their sharp skin.

The Whispering Death laughed. "They are such rascals aren't they?"

"Yeah, rascalsâ€¦" I muttered, turning my gaze towards the peak in the middle of the island. I bet if I went over to there I could find that door Mildew was banging against and probably find my way back to the girls, wherever they were. And if the Whispering Deaths on this island weren't going to attack me, I think I was safe to go. "I think I'll just leave you to them."

The small dragons didn't seem to notice me as I backed away, their father was seemingly the same way, his blind gaze following his young. I trekked away, hoping to leave the same family alone. But before I could leave, the Whispering Death's voice called out to me: "How is your mother, Night Fury? Did she ever connect with her mate again?"

I stopped in my tracks. How was I supposed to answer this? Do I lie? No. No, I had to be honest. We weren't enemies, for now. "She did," I answered. "Mom and Dad got along great, but things have beenâ€¦ well in a whileâ€¦"

The Whispering Death seemed to nod absentmindedly, "I see. Carry

on. "

And then with his permission, I left the dragons and then made my way towards the small mountain in the middle. With my cloak still not working as well as it should, I had to move forward the old fashioned way, step by step. I wish I had spent more time familiarizing myself with the area, too. Once I was firmly on the mountain's base, I circled around, hoping to catch sight of the battle last night. I didn't want to go back there, not with the threat that Mildew might still be there, but up until I found I wouldn't be able to find camp.

My walk didn't take long, since the island was not all that big,, but by the time I looked up I saw the sun high up in the sky; it might have been noon or some time after it. Ahead of me, I saw the iron doors that the old man battered against the night before, still unopened. No one was there, not Mildew, not my friends. The only evidence that I saw that anyone had been by that iron door in ages was the scorch marks seared into the ground by lightning. I guess the fact there weren't any bodies around was a good thing, right?

I thought about leaving this place, making my way back and finding our campsite. Maybe if I was lucky, my friends would have escaped. We could regroup and try fighting that old man again or maybe leave this place. Yet, at the same time, I was drawn towards the door. I wondered what was inside, so important for that old man to risk everything and come to the middle of nowhere. I didn't see him anywhere, though, maybe he could have hid himself using that trick he pulled last night.

I took the risk; I didn't have any way to defend myself yet; if I could get inside maybe, just maybe I could find something, anything to fight back with. I approached the door and looked at my surroundings one last time before I decided what I needed to do. Nothing happened; I was not attacked. Mildew didn't' just put out from nowhere and shocked me with a jolt. I seemed to be alone.

I turned back the iron door, actual should I say doors? It was one of those special double door setups, but made entirely out of iron instead of wood. Each door was easily the size of well, me, Night Fury-me. Yet, the metal was old and covered in rust and grime, enough that I wondered why they didn't just fall apart from sheer corrosion. Mildew tried to get them open, but they took whatever he hit them with. In fact, the doors themselves didn't seem to even have a lock or and any visible knobs. How were you suppose to lock them without trapping yourself inside or open them if you were stuck outside? Maybe they were magic? Well, if the doors were magical, what must be inside?

Okay, so, before I try busting them down, I gotta figure out how sturdy the doors were. I moved my hand over towards the center of the two rusted doors, trying to gauge how firmly shut they wereâ€| but that didn't happen. The doors caved inward at my touch, throwing up a cloud of dust as they landed with a thud.

I blew away the dust and covered my face, annoyed. Okay, I was prepared to go try spending the rest of the day forcing my way in, and instead the doors just flatout fall just like that? Maybe everyone around me is right and my life is part of some great cosmic joke, because nothing else I could think of could explain that.

As the dust settled, I stopped fanning particles away from my face and looked inside. The room was dark enough that I couldn't see anything within, well, almost nothing. Something glistened inside, metal of some sort. With the door open, I could easily step in, but what would I find there. I shook my head, no, I wasn't afraid of the dark; I've been through worse but were the doors there to keep trespassers out, or to keep something in? _

I gulped and stepped forward, hoping I made the right call.

I immediately regretted my decision as I suddenly found myself tripping over something that felt wooden, maybe a chair. Stupid darkness.

I got up and moved forward yet again only to trigger the sound of something clay like shattering against the ground. I jerked away and found myself running into something like a sheet fabric and that came falling on the ground too. And that caused something else to fall over. Stupid, stupid darkness.

I dashed forward and moved towards whatever it was I saw out there. I grabbed onto the nearest part of that object, finding my hands clasping some sort of grip.

I immediately decided that before I broke even more unseeable things, I had to leave. So, I ran out of the cave. Surprisingly, I didn't run into anything else, maybe because destroyed everything else. I sat with my back facing against the wall, suddenly finding myself a whole lot more sympathetic to my brother.

I then took a glance up at what I potentially risked life and limb to recover. It appeared to be a sword of some sort, still in its scabbard. The metal in the hilt must have been what caught my attention, but outside, it appeared to be a dull grey, plain and unimpressive by any standards. Removing the sword from its cheap leather scabbard, the blade looked to be at least decent and free from too much wear. It was otherwise just an ordinary looking sword.

I sighed, I guess a weapon I was bad at using was better than no weapons at all in my state. I wonder if Hiccup's having an easier time than I am.

* * *

><p>If my life had gone a different direction, being "acting Chief" would have been a learning experience for some future day I might have been ready to assume the "throne". As it was, being "acting Chief" was slowly starting to feel more and more just "Chief". I hope that was just going to remain a feeling. The meeting with the rest of the Council went better than last time, mostly because one of the other members ended up spontaneously start turning into a Gronkle a few minutes into the meeting. At that point, the Council reluctantly decided that I had to go deal with this, with Gothi's suggestion, of course.<p>

So then began a day long round up of me trying to round up all of the people changing into dragons. The spell I wrought had completely failed by now. Everyone who was cursed by that spear Alvin brought

along started going through that slow and painful transformation a second time, as if being afflicted by the same spell a second time. Thankfully no one had died so far, but everyone undergoing the change was badly incapacitated by the pain.

I asked my friends to help, breaking up the village into chunks so that everyone could administer to the villagers. Everyone had their own sections, though the twins technically shared theirs with everyone elseâ€¦ a little redundancy and overlap to make sure they wouldn't cause problems with their usual antics.

I chose the docks, mostly because no one else would take it. "Stay calm," I spoke to the Vikings before me.

I had about six patients a little over halfway through their changes. They twisted and writhed on top of the mats I had set out for each of them. Some let out painful moans while others slowly suffered in silence; one of my charges was screaming at the top of her lungs before passing out.

A nearby Viking, a volunteer leaned down and patted a hot towel onto one of the soon to be dragon's heads. Once the Viking was done with the towel, I took it and put into a jug of warm water. "Come on, Magnhild, stay with me," he cooed over his charge.

A sound like a rumbling storm bellowed forth in the background. Me and several of my helpers raised their heads and turned towards the sea. The noise went off again and this time two of them ran out of the building. "It's Thornado!" bellowed one of the men.

"He's got another one!" said the other.

They ran out and met the source of the noise head on. Thornado, a Thunderdrum, waited at the end of the pier, carrying an unconscious Viking atop his massive back, floating just about level with the pier. The two men jumped on top of the dragon and lifted up the villager and hauled him towards the rest of them. The Thunderdrum looked rather pleased with himself.

I exited the building just in time for the two Vikings to set the newly recovered villager onto a new mat.

"Thornado" was a bit of an odd name. I couldn't actually say it in Draconic or Norse, at least not without butchering it badly. See, the name relied on word play that only made sense in some language spoken on some islands on the far south. The closest I could get would be Thunderer's Wind Storm, but I knew him by a different name, still unpronounceable to a dragon name. "You did well. That's the fifth one you gotten."

Roland, the Thunderdrum burst into a grin. "Hey, I did, didn't I? Well, I guess all that time practicing paid off."

I nodded, drawing myself inside again. "Why don't you stay a while; I don't think there's anymore out there who need your assistance. And besides, this is your home after all."

"Yeah, could use a break." The Thunderdrum nodded and then leaned his body against the nearest wall. He came a long way from his days when just speaking would cause problems for everyone and everything around

him. As crazy as it was, his decision to not change back paid off now that I needed him to ferry the patients towards a central location to treat them all at the same time. Roland's home, now that it was mostly cleaned up and enough of the holes have been sealed to keep rain from seeping in seemed like a good choice. Still had no idea who it was who decided to name him; maybe my Dad.

I turned back to my charges and wondered what would happen next. They were fine now, but only Odin knew what the future held. There were going to be problems, especially since by now Astrid's Flight would have seen the problem plaguing the village as of late and then there would be questions, lots and lots of questions. Especially once the dragons started talking about the King and then Skullcrusher is not going to be the only one asking me the one question I didn't know the answer to. "Hey, um, you were a warrior right?"

The Thunderdrum rolled over on his back and gave me a confused look. "I was?" the answer came out, almost as if he sounded unsure.

"So, you've killed uh, Kin before right?" Then I realized how the weird pronunciation ended up making me sound like I was about to commit some sort of murder. "Uh, other kind of Kin."

Roland blinked a few times, as if unsure. "Uh, well, yeah," he said. "I mean, lots of people have."

"But not me," I said, rolling my eyes. I must have sounded so dumb. A dragon asking about killing other dragons, yeah, figures that be me. "I mean, how'd you do it?"

The Thunderdrum yawned. "Just do it, I guess? I mean, that's all there is to killing Kin, right?"

If only it were that easy. I mean, I had Toothless at my mercy when I first met him and I backed out at the last moment because I was afraid to do it. I had every reason in the world to do that, but I couldn't carry it out. Would the same thing happen to me when I face the King? I shook my head. And that was assuming I got lucky and somehow managed to beat him. It seemed impossible.

There was a knocking at the door, loud and violent.

Everyone in the room turned towards the source of the noise. One of the attendees got up from the pile of the injured and answered. I moved right behind him, as it was kind of my job to oversee things. "Who's there?" he answered.

A voice shouted, human. "Where is he?"

But the other voices that accompanied that were not. "Yeah! Show us that trouble maker!"

"It's all his fault!" cried another voice, somewhere between a man and a dragon.

Great. Just great. I had hoped that not everyone was crippled by the King's spell undoing itself, but apparently some of those people wanted my blood. I guess with all of the painful disfigurement and horrific bone and scale growth setting in, they needed something to do to vent their frustrations on, but why couldn't they have

something else other than _me?_

"Open up!" cried the human.

I slowly backed away from the door. The attendant who answered it slowly turned to me, waiting for my order. I shook my head. I did not want to deal with any of that. No, not at all.

The Viking nodded and replied. "No, not here!" he responded. At least some people were on my side.

"Then open up!" cried one of the half-man-half-dragons, the door was battered again this time louder. The patients stirred in their mats, this noise upsetting them.

"If he's not here! Then let us in!" cried one of the human voice.

The attendee looked at me again, waiting for further orders.

I gulped. It was my fault, sure, but I just had the feeling that I might be facing torches and pitchforks out there. I messed up a lot in the past and nearly got tried for all sorts of things ranging from property damage and broken bones. The only reason I ever got put up to anything much worse than being sent to bed without supper was because Dad was around. And he wasn't here right now.

If only hadn't taken the King's deal, none of this would have happened. Heck, I'm sure if I didn't find a certain little black book, I wouldn't have started this whole mess and Alvin probably wouldn't have found that spear of his and he might have never made this whole situation happen in the first place. No one would be forced to turn into dragons, no one would be in this room sprawling in pain; I wouldn't be facing a small mob.

"You know, you could just beat them," supplied Roland, AKA Thornado.

I blinked for a moment, not really understanding. "Wait, you mean fight them?" I whispered. I really hoped the partial dragons behind the door didn't have improved hearing at this point. Oh, right, I could fight my way out of this. Yeah, completely forgot that part of being a dragon meant that I had the prowess of a dragon but that had its own issues. "No. What about the patients?" If I started a fight here, whatever happened might cause further harm to the afflicted and I put them in as much trouble as it was already. And besides, the mob that came after me had good reason.

Roland shook his head, impressive since he completely lacked a neck. "Alright, that I get, but you gotta do something, right?"

I nodded and turned to one of the back windows. One of the windows was still not fixed properly. Repairs might have been done to make the house livable to anyone who wasn't Roland himself, but not everything was patched in. I could easily bust out of there and make myself a hole big enough to jump out of, but that would draw the attention of the mob. I turned back to Roland. "Think you can make a loud and noisy distraction?"

The Thunderdrum shrugged. "Sure, but, uh, what're you gonna do?"

I shrugged in response. "Lay low for a while, like I usually do when every I get enough people mad enough at me."

"Answer me!" said one of the human members of my angry mob. "I can hear dragons growling back there."

"Just a moment! You're disturbing the patients."

The Vikings in the room turned to look at me. "Alright, alright, here's the plan." I tapped my hand onto the ground and gold runes appeared. I let them know of my plan and then quickly removed them with another swipe. I moved towards the window, in preparation; I really hoped no one betrayed me as it was carried out.

Once everyone was ready, we all did one last quick check to see when everyone was in place. At the last moment, Roland blasted open the window with a hideously destructive shout. Everyone in the room, patients included, covered their ears, reeling from the attack on their ears. I probably took the brunt of it, my ears being the most finely tuned and me being the closest.

"What was that?" shouted everyone at the door.

"Open up!"

But I had no time to recover in peace. I leapt outside the window and placed my body close to the wall, low as I can go with my tail curled towards my chest. Night Furies were made for stealth, but not in the middle of the day and on the ground. Hopefully, no one caught me out here.

I heard the door open and boot steps and stomps make their way in, the mob entered into the room and probably had their eyes everywhere.

"Where'd that noise come from?"

"Excuse me!" I heard Roland reply. Hopefully, they bought it, but I knew better than to stick around here.

One of the partial dragon-Vikings murmured, in Norse, "A sneeze. A blasted sneeze."

There was some grumbling out there.

I slowly inched myself away from the building and headed as close as I could towards the water. That'd remove any scent trails and obscure me long enough to head somewhere safe to wait for their anger to subside.

I made it towards the water, in a few nervous minutes and leapt into the bay. I spent what might have been a good ten to fifteen minutes pretending I was a sea turtle or an overgrown marine iguana before I decided to pull myself to shore. Once I was on some of the unoccupied beach around the island, I quickly went through my options.

I could go home, but I was sure that there'd be all sort of people looking for me there; so that was a no go.

I could go to my friends, especially my girlfriend, Astrid. That had a load of problems, especially since I'd be inviting my problems onto other people and while I was sure Astrid could defend herself, especially with all of the dragons under her command, I did not want to cause things to escalated badly enough to spawn a miniature war. Snotlout's father, my uncle probably had some dislike for me as well. And Fishlegs was Fishlegs.

No. I had only one option. I decided to retreat to that small private glade that I needed to meet Skullcrusher. I was going to need to go there eventually, might as well hide there right now.

I shook of the water that built up on me and then took to the skies. I was far enough away that I doubted most people looking my general direction would think of me as a dragon, least of all, well, me.

In far less time than I spent as a fish, I made it to that sinkhole. To my surprise, Skullcrusher was already there hauling some sort of log towards a small cave in the cliff walls. And fire shot out of it, lighting the log on ablaze. I quickly descended onto the sinkhole edge, realizing that my so called teacher was not alone and I really didn't know whether to introduce myself or not.

I hid behind the nearest piece of cover I could, a few rocks and overgrown bushes and peered below. I couldn't see the dragon who blasted the log on fire, my eyes might have been able to see in the darkness, but right now they were geared towards observing things in the daylight. In fact, I couldn't even see the dragon's eyes lighting up in the darkness. Maybe it was some sort of power?

"You take too long," said the unknown dragon, in a tone that reminded me of shallow breaths mixed with snarls and hisses.

"Hey, cut me some slash;I brought what you asked for!" answered Skullcrusher.

The dragon hissed again. "We are running out of time! He must prevail!"

"I know," Skullcrusher responded, averting his gaze away from the dragon who hid in the darkness. "What do you want me to do about it?"

The log was blasted by another gout of flame, searing it. "Show him this, let him know more of who he faces."

I could at least hear them, but what were they talking about? Me? It sounded like it.

Skullcrusher stepped on the log with one of his front feet and dragged it towards himself, still ablaze. "I guess, the kid's gotta right to know but all the same, he's to a right to see you."

The dragon hissed. "When the time comes, he will see." And then the cave seemed to melt, becoming a solid wall in the cliff base, as if it was never there. In fact, I don't think I ever seen a cave there before. Was there a cave really there or was it created by the strange dragon inside?

Skullcrusher sighed and coiled himself around the still burning log.

I waited a few minutes waiting for something else to happen and give myself an excuse to pretend I saw none of that. Who was that dragon and where did he come from? Was he the one that Skullcrusher was acting as the messenger to? If so, why? And why did he have such a vested interest in allowing me to beat the King?

Once a few minutes elapsed I glided down towards Skullcrusher. The Rumblehorn raised his head in mild surprise. "Well, you're here early, kid," said the dragon.

"I could say the same about you," I replied, eying the still burning log. Surprisingly, it didn't look like the flames were burning it, as if the log itself was fireproof and yet it still maintained the blaze. "What's that there?"

The Rumblehorn shared a draconic grin, as if amused. "Well, why don't I show you?"

55. Chapter 55

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I'm going to regret this aren't I? The reflection in the water I saw wasn't my own, well it was my own, at least, now it was. Gah, it was just going to take some time getting used to. I mean, I'm green and covered in armored warts, I'm on all fours, and well yeah. Well, I guess if all else fails, Meatlug would be pleased.

"So?" Called Snotlout from behind me, drawing my attention. "What'dya think?"

I grinned sheepishly, oh, Odin, my jaw was so big. Just moving it a little made me feel like a fourth of my body was pulling together for a smile. "Uh, great." My voice felt so weak, like I was a mouse. So not matching up to my body.

"Uhuh," murmured Snotlout. "You did kinda ask for it."

I nodded and sighed. Yeah, me and my now incredibly big mouth asked for it. I wasn't human anymore. I decided that if I was going to be a Knight for dragons and be Meatlug's friend, I had to skip that awkward phase between being me and being what I was now. Now, I just hoped I didn't live to regret it. What I just did practically amounted to cursing myself as far as Vikings were concerned, but is it really that bad when you got a plan to use it?

Snotlout yawned as if tired and then leapt out of his seat with greater energy. "Great, now you just go out there and meet up with your underlings, show them who's boss!"

I blinked, the thought sounding so new and frightening despite having thought of and planning it for ages. "But, I can't!" I wailed, tried to wail most like. Oh, maybe I wasn't cut out for being a Knight.

Snotlout rolled his eyes and then leapt towards me. He shoved his body against my own and then tried to push me towards the door. "Come on, you're a big strong dragon! Okay, not as awesome as me when I did

it, or Hookfang, but you're being a bit of a big whimp!"

I felt powerless to stop him from moving me. Even as a human I outmassed him, but never have I reallyâ€¦ well, done so well against him when he had an idea in his head. Even now, I could barely hold my ground and I slipped ever closer towards the nearest door. "But what if they, my Kin, don't accept me!"

"Then make them accept you!" he responded. "I mean, you've beat dragon heads before!"

"That was different!"

Before Snotlout was in range to twist open the door knob and Hookfang stepped forward into view. "Uh Snotlout and, uhâ€¦" he bent down and looked towards me, as if unsure of something.

"Ah, perfect timing, Hookfang!" declare Snotlout. "Come on, help me push this loser out the door! Ow!"

I smashed Snotlout with my clubbed tail for that, but I then started to feel a little embarrassed over that, especially since his immediate servitor was right in front of me. "Uh, sorry," I replied meekly, turning to Hookfang.

The Nightmare-That-Wasn't scratched his head for several moments, before uttering my name. "Fishlegs is that you?"

My grin got wider. Oh, this was going to take some time to get used to. "Yeah, me."

"You'reâ€¦ green," he commented. "And a Gronckleâ€¦"

"Yup..." Oh, even when I tried to be loud it sounded like mice squeaking. I was totally hopeless. Fishlegs the Awkward Green Gronckleâ€¦ I guess I've been called worse things before I went through puberty.

I felt Snotlout's arms and palms against my hardened sides once again, pushing me forward through the still open doorway. "And he needs to get out."

Hookfang got out of the way, as if reasoning that there was no point in fighting against Snotlout over it. Oh, why couldn't have been a little disobedient just this once? "Um, after that, Astrid's calling a bit of an emergency."

"Emergency?" Snotlout stopped pushing, thankfully. "Uh, yeah, sure, anything for Astrid." I saw him scratching at the back of his neck. "Uh, what's the problem?"

Hookfang looked at me, giving me a grimace. "We're gonna have moreâ€¦ dragon problems."

"More of them?" I squealed. "You mean the others, they're allâ€¦ reverting?"

Hookfang nodded solemnly.

I bowed my head, feeling a little shameful. Oh, just great Fishlegs.

You had to pick the perfect time to go turn yourself into a Gronckle. Loads of other people are probably going to look down at you for opting to change when so many others don't get that choice. I mean, maybe I can lie and say that I did so to better aid them, but well, why didn't I do that last time? And I bet I'll have to deal with the problem of filing

Snotlout's hands left my side and the other Hooligan boy stepped out of the door way, pulling Hookfang along with him, or trying to at any rate. Unlike me, Hookfang stood firm, so firm in fact, that Snotlout practically tripped over himself in trying to get him out. That didn't seem to deter or upset him, instead he redoubled his efforts and kept pulling for Hookfang to come with; pretty anything Astrid related got him all worked up like that. Hookfang still didn't see to budge. He did seem to finally let up though and simply went along with Snotlout.

I was left alone, in the former home of public enemy number one. Oh, I wasn't ready for this. I was hoping that doing this would be a simple affair of just making sure the other dragons sayed out of trouble, but now, well, someone's gotta explain the mess that we're in. And I didn't know if I could even explain this without the Flight freaking out. I mean, Firewrym is pretty much proof that some people just don't seem willing to accept that humans were simply more than a "Herd".

I rose to all four of my tiny feeling feet, finally mustering upâ€¦ something to help me get outside. I doubt it was courage; I was still too afraid. I nudged open the doorâ€¦ and stepped outside.

The fields outside of Mildew's old home was covered in a field of noise. It was kind of always like that ever since Astrid brought the entirety of the Flight here, but today, things were different. The dragons all barked, yipped, growled, and cried out with their usual erratic tongues, but this time, I was able to listen. I could vaguely overhear two Nadders gossiping about an affair involving another, a Nightmare was bragging towards some Gronckles over strength, and much more.

Before, while I've grown used to thinking of dragons likeâ€¦ people, but with a different language and culture; I mean, I wouldn't treat Meatlug so well if I didn't. But now, I justâ€¦ felt like I was one of those Viking explorers who sailed to different lands.

I suddenly felt my limbs turning into liquid and my newly acquired armored plates seem to fall off. All I could do was just ooze forward down, trying to grasp it all; Bork the Bold, as awesome as he was, never reallyâ€¦ knew dragons, not compared to this. I wonder what it must be like when you're in one of their fully occupied nests, the number of voices had to be staggering, like it was their own village.

"Watch where you're going!"

I leapt in a random direction and hid behind the closest thing I could, a through, that now that I thought about it was smaller than I was.

I heard a voice sighing from my left. "Foolish commoner, you could have stepped on my wing!" The one who startled me had clearly

expressed disappointment. Yeah, suited me just peachy.

I raised my head out from underneath my hiding spot, looking at someone a little familiar, making me feel even more awkward. "... Firewrym?" I questioned.

The Nightmare before me was in her natural state, as she liked to be when she wasn't instructed to wear her amulet. She rolled her eyes in boredom. "All you lowborn Kin know better than to use that on me, I told you this before. That name is just what I have instructed the Herd use upon me."

I blinked. She didn't recognize me? Well, I guess maybe she wouldn't be angry at me for our first meeting. I mean, she probably was super mad at me for attacking her that one time, right? Then again, maybe I should introduce myselfâ€¦ "Well, you see, I'm not really, umâ€¦"

The Nightmare narrowed her eyes upon me like some sort of foreboding statue. "Not what?" She brought her gaze closer, almost placing her face right in front of mine.

If I still had the ability sweat, I would have have done that. I backed away. She sniffed the air in front of me, catching me scent. Oh, great, she was going to figure out who I was; I learned from long ago that changing apparently didn't change someone's scentâ€¦ even though that was biologically impossible. But that probably didn't matter; she'd know it was me.

"Hm, I don't know you," answered the Nightmare.

I blinked, a little surprised. Then again, I've kinda made it my job to avoid being in her general vicinity; I didn't want her being angry at me; she probably never got my scent.

"I don't recall seeing you amongst the Flight before," mused the dragon, then turning her gaze towards me, more intent than before. "You must be one of thoseâ€¦ Herd."

My head moved practically on its own. "Yeah, changed this morning," I answered.

Firewrym raised her head and let out something that sounded more like a pained wail than any murderous; hopefully. She then pounded her wing onto the ground as if to break it appart, but all she did was kick up some dirt into the air. "Great, and I thought we had rounded up the lot of you already!" she barked.

I grinned nervously, vaguely remembering that I wasn't the only one undergoing a change to the draconic side.

I didn't speak, not when Firewrym quashed any attempt at speaking to her with her own voice. "Gah, why do I have to go through any of this? You creatures should have stayed as yourselves, lesser than my own Kin and not go throughâ€¦ changes unless some higher power manages to find something redeemable. Even more, I most certainly shouldn't be taking care any of you, such falls to less important members of society!" She then turned to me in a low growl. "At least you don't need to be babysat like the others. You're done changing."

So, _I _wasn't the thing she was the most upset about? Well, I'll take what I can get. "Yup!" I nodded vigorously.

The Nightmare rolled her eyes. "Make yourself useful then." She then turned her gaze over to a nearby barrel. "See that over there?"

I nodded, unsure. Man, I'm glad she's not that upset at me.

"Take it with you, we will need to feed our new charges when they finish," she huffed and then turned her gaze back to me. "Well, what are you waiting for? I'm not carrying it on my mouth!"

I jumped and then moved over towards said barrel. I almost grabbed onto the thing with my hands, but then I realized I didn't have those anymore. Firewrym made annoyed noises for my forgetfulness. Well, I guess her being bossy made up for her lack of wrath. I tilted my head slightly and then stuck my jaws over it and then closed my jaws. This was so awkward. The barrel wasn't so heavy; I mean, even Hiccup could lift one of these things, but yuck, the taste of wood felt like it was going to stick with me for a week. Even worse, I could practically taste the slimy contents inside, yet my mouth watered despite how gross that should have been to me. I think this was part of the fish rations Hiccup ordered for the Flight. Being a Gronckle, not what I was expecting.

With the barrel firmly in my jaws and not threatening to spill out, Firewrym uttered another huff and then led the way forward. I followed behind her.

We traveled through the fields of dragons that dotted the area. Most made themselves at home, setting up nesting sites in the old man's crushed crops and tall grass or flying over the skies above. Oh, that's something I gotta look forward to, right? Me and Meatlug, flying.

Eventually, Firewrym led us into a clearing, or at least, it would be a clearing if it wasn't already so occupied. There were rows and rows of people spread out everywhere, each sprawled atop piles of hay, making groaning noise. When I say people, I say that because the terms "human" or "Viking" really didn't suit them anymore. Each was somewhere close to dragon now, barely hanging on to their final portions of uncorrupted human anatomy. As the guy who made it his business to know things, I cataloged their changes the first time they were cursed by Alvin the Monstrous and I regret knowing exactly what was going on their bodies. I almost feel guilty for taking the "easy way" changing. At least it wouldn't be long now before the pain stopped, small mercies I guess.

At the center of the clearing, I saw Astrid as much of a Nadder as ever, barking orders over towards a few of her subordinates; I came just in time to overhear what might have been the last parts of some sort of complex order. "...After you are are done, you must return. Speak to no one."

And as soon as she said the word, the dragons all took to the skies as fast as they could; whether that came from loyalty or fear, I sure didn't know.

Firewrym grunted, drawing Astrid's attention. "Hmph, you should have

sent me for that mission: I would have got the job done better than any commoner envoys you could have sent."

Astrid as if not caring enough about her, decided to clean her wings. "I doubt that," she replied. "But I need you here where I could see you."

"So you admit you don't trust me?" barked the Nightmare.

"She isn't saying that!" cried another dragon. Meatlug stood behind Astrid. Both of the more assertive dragons turned towards her. "I mean, well, you're too noticeable is all, you'd have gotten noticed by our other Kin so easily, isn't that right?"

Firewrym huffed out smoke. "Maybeâ€|" she said, as if trying not to care. She shook her head and then changed the topic. "Either way, I found another straggler on my way over."

"Straggler you say?" muttered Astrid.

Firewrym turned towards me and then I became the center of attention. Yeah, not good. If my legs didn't turn to stone and my teeth didn't dig into the wood of the barrel, I probably might have twitched to make a response; as it was, I felt like I was a statue; a statue of an incredibly awkward Gronckle that was idiotically holding a barrel in his mouth.

Astrid didn't seem to recognize me, given that she was eying me in almost the same way Firewrym did. Yeah, she probably didn't know too much of my scent either.

"Fishlegs?" Yet it seemed someone obviously did. Meatlug approached me while I was still as frozen as a glacier, sniffing me. "Is that... it's you!" she declared.

I felt my jaw loosen and the barrel slipped right out, rolling few inches away before stopping. Yet, my mouth decided to show an even more awkward position, instead becoming locked into a smile, one that I was trying to talk through; "Yesh. Itsa veeâ€|" came out.

Meatlug licked me in the face and suddenly, it felt like I was made of flesh and blood again. She laughed. "Well, looks like you came just in time; we've got some work to do."

"... Yeah," I replied. I felt strange, my rear end just wouldn't stop moving on its own; up and down, up and down. I really didn't know, but as long as Meatlug accepted me, things were going to be okay, right?

Astrid seemed to be the first to take notice of well, me, now that she knew who I was. She seemed laugh as well, but only on the inside. "Yes. Good to see you among Kin; are you ready to serve as my Knight?"

I nodded. "It's why I'm here." And because now, I can spend time among friends.

"Excellent," declared Astrid. "Now, go take Firewrym andâ€|"

"Wait, where'd she go?" asked Meatlug, breaking off Astrid before she

could finish her orders.

I blinked and then looked around. She was right, the Nightmare seemingly vanished into thin air. She wasn't in the sky, nor was she in the fields of soon to be dragons. "What happened to her?"

Astrid groaned and then slapped her wing into her snout. "Typical. At least Stormfly has good reason to run off!"

* * *

><p>He looked up on me that scornful look, as an enemy should. An old hateful man that I would love to shatter beneath my talons or rend with poisoned spines. Now if only I could just get out there and tear him apart.<p>

I struggled against my bindings, pulling myself, but then reeled back as pain shot up in my chest and legs. I felt little droplets of blood pouring down my body as iron tighten against me. I just have looked hideous after all that strain and suffering, but I didn't care about that enough right now.

The old man just looked at me, from behind the old iron wooden door that kept him apart from me. "I wouldn't do that after you, beast," he spat.

I hissed. "You'll pay for what you've done!" I howled. I wanted to carve his throat up and let him rot for his crime, yet he held me captive. I hated being in chains, I had enough of them when I was on Berk and imprisoned. Being stuck on some aging derelict and wrapped in chains made this just as bad as being in the Arena when I was a prisoner and covered in filth. I struggled again, hoping to break apart the iron that held me.

He still kept watch of me, not responding to my aggression. I wish he could know what I said, to let him know how much I hated him. He then let out a sigh, as if bored, the filth. "Of course you wouldn't really get it, would you?"

I then felt my chains tighten even more, the iron spikes on each ring scratching against my body. I howled in pain and rage. This last insult was only marginally less than the first. I hissed.

"Quiet down will you!" snarled the man. "At least your compatriot knows better than you, beast!"

"Well, that's because I don't wanna talk to you," spat my ally, her tone dripping with an insult. Camicazi sat in the space behind me, also chained up in a cocoon of spiked metal. She barely moved once we got in here, probably because she wasn't in as much of a need to rip and tear our captor as I was. "You got nice chains, don't get me wrong, but your breath is horrible!"

"It's not!" the old man barked but then immediately cupped his breath in his hands to smell it. He rolled his eyes, realizing the ploy. "Whatever, you two should rot in there for all I care!" He then turned his back and began stepping away. "Good bye!."

"We will escape! And get you!" I howled, but he was already gone.

Without a target to vent my hatred on, I dropped my body onto the floor, the spiked chains around me making it uncomfortable to lay there, but I needed the pain, the anger to focus on.

Before this voyage, I barely knew the one they called Mildew, only that he was a minor enemy of my friends and Toothless, one that harried them in the beginning of this. Now though, I finally saw him as someone who desperately was in need of death. He harmed Toothless's brother and slew Toothless himself last night. That last part was not forgivable.

I wanted to steam some more, plan out my revenge. Now I got to realize why he was so anxious to rid the world of him. He was dangerous, a thread, and needed to be removed.

When Toothless was stripped of his Night Fury form and send hurtling into the distance, I tried to go after him, tried to save him. But that all played into the old man's hands. He made a spell that wrapped Camicazi in metallic chains that seemingly came from nowhere and wrapped themselves around her. I met a similar fate when I tried to snatch her away from the old man, ending up imprisoned in the same state. After that, we both found ourselves here, in some moldy old ship's hold. How we got here, I don't know; I didn't even see how we got in here without going through the rest of the ship. It might have been further magic, I don't know, but I'll end him!

"He's gone, isn't he?" I heard Camicazi speak.

I raised my head, turning towards my companion. "You mean Toothless" I asked. But then I just remembered she couldn't understand me, not while I was like this. I nodded my head solemnly.

Camicazi sighed; it seemed almost surreal coming from her. "He was good for a boy, yeah?" she mused. "You two ever, you know, did anything?"

I looked at her funny. "What?" I mean, what was she talking about.

"You know!" she replied. "I mean, you and he were, well, you know"

The idea got to me. Right human practice for couples wasn't limited to mating season or even breeding age for some reason. Though honestly, at this point a part of me understood why. I liked being around him, helping him fulfill his goals. I treasured the purple garment he bought for me, I felt like I had a place with him. But as of late, he was a little distant, more focused towards achieving his revenge. I helped him, even here, but his goals were often violent. But it never rose to the level Camicazi implied and now, it never will. I shook my head.

"You're lying!" she blurted out. But then a sigh escaped her lips and her tone became more subdued. "You aren't lying are you?"

I shook my head. No, as appealing as the idea sounded, it was not true. I guess sometimes, even I can't lie.

I saw Camicazi's eyes roll. "I don't believe it..." I heard her

mutter with some strange distaste though I am not sure at what was her problem.

I just kept looking at her, hoping my look was understandable as "What's bothering you?"

Camicazi looked like she understood. "Hey, I met him first, you know!" she responded. "I mean, I gotta wonder how life is as one of his earliest friends, yah?"

If I had eyebrows right now, they'd be raised. I guess her reasoning made sense, though I wasn't really sure if she was being completely honest with me. Oh, I wish I wasn't the only one with really obvious tells, but I suppose that's something Bog Burglars have to hide, isn't it?

"Justâ€| leave it be," said Camicazi. "Itâ€| doesn't matter anymore."

I frowned and turned my gaze towards my chains. Yeah, I suppose whatever reasons and motives Camicazi had didn't matter if the source of them all was now a bloodied smear. Toothless was gone, and we might be too if we stayed around here longer.

I turned my gaze at Camicazi and then at her chains before going back to her, letting out a skree that hopefully could be understood through the language barrier. "Can you get rid of that?"

Camicazi sighed and then suddenly seemed to be a little cheerier, more like her usual self. "Well, just a moment here!" she barked and then swung her body around as if to try to wiggle herself out. "These things are weird! Ain't got no locks and always seem to have enough space to not cut you upâ€| until you try to get free!"

I nodded. The chains were probably the result of spellcraft of some sort, like the kind Mildew was said to use. Though I don't recall anyone telling us about him doing anything other than more lightning. I wondered if those powers were things he always had, or maybe things that were recent acquisitions. If the latter, since when and how?

I saw Camicazi struggling against the chains again, though she was paying close attention to her bindings, maybe trying to puzzle her way throughs. "Well, atleast it's not as simple as breaking a lock with a hairpin!" she sounded so happy to say that.

"What?"

"Hey, don't give me that look!" she yelped. "It'd be boring if every time I was in chains the result was the same!"

I sighed. "Just get us out." So we might kill the old man.

Camicazi struggled against her chains some more but then let out a yelp as they stung her in some place. "Okay, that's not how you do it!" she then relaxed her body, letting the chains respond in kind by releasing their grip ever so slightly.

I hated this. The chains responded to struggling with more struggling, letting up only when the wearer did not fight back. The spikes were painful, not necessarily life threatening, but they

stabbed and stung, making it hard to wriggle out of the chains and punished the victim for trying. If only I could break out of my chains.

I struggled again, hoping that maybe this time I could break free, but they were just too strong. I just wanted to crush the old man!

Camicazi seemed to go still for a moment, her body turning limb and lying against the floor. "Okay, this gonna hurt," she complained.

I just looked upon her. How was she supposed to break free when she was lying against the floor as if she had died. What was she hoping to accomplish?

Yet as I saw, something strange happened. She moved her body and her bindings did not come with her, did not contain her. She moved and breathed, seemingly pulling herself from the chains. It was like she was slipping away.

"Well, I am certainly amazing," she bragged, throwing off the chains into a corner. They then seemed to turn into dust before my very eyes, as if they weren't there. Gah, magic.

I just beamed at her. "How?"

She smiled, as if understanding me. "You gotta relax, doncha know? It's one of 'em Eastern silk finger bindings Mum brought me once!"

Silk, as in the same cloth my scarf was made of, could be used to make restraints? That sounded unreal. Silk was soft, light weight; it didn't seem like it could withstand much. I sighed and then rattled my chains, but then again, I guess fingers were easier to handle. I didn't see how relaxing was going to get me out of these bindings, nor did I see how I could relax given that all I could was my own anger and pain.

"Alright, alright, calm down," she exclaimed. She then leapt over to me and started tugging at my chains.

I howled in pain. "Watch it!" I cried. I think they might have cut open something near my shoulders.

"You gotta relax more, Stormfly, else I can't get you out?"

"How am I supposed to relax while I'm suffering?" I begged.

Camicazi shrugged, either responding my question or not knowing what I said. I hate the language barrier. "Just think happy thoughts while I work, ya?"

I snorted, but tried to do what she asked. What made me happy, I wondered. I suppose not having to live in this moldy old longship would be a start, be somewhere warm and comfortable, maybe a bath. Some clothing, too. Good stuff, more silks. Maybe some jewelry. I was fond of those parts of human experience. Hm, how about going home. I haven't really thought much of my family, what's left of it anyways. I just cannot understand why the Red Death would cause such hostilities, not any more; it would be great to return to a time of

peace. And maybe, if only Toothless was still alive. I sighed. Yeah, I'd want that for sure. Maybe if he was around, I could finally talk to him about some of the things I've been thinking of. Aboutâ€| us.

I felt the weight of the chains coming off me, their sting removed and fading away as metal turned into a dust cloud. I blinked back into reality just in time to see myself come free.

"All done!" cheered the Bog Burglar.

I let out a pleased sounding growl. Ah it was good to be free, even when covered with shadow cuts and cobwebs from an old building. But none of that mattered compared towards how good I felt now that I was unrestrained.

I stood and then turned towards the door, the one that stood in our way. Camicazi nearly jumped in front of it and started trying to break the lock or undo whatever bar kept it shut. "Alright, so it's a simple prison door. Lock's not even on this side so, all I gotta do is reach over and-"

But I didn't have the patience to wait. I rammed my taloned foot against the door, letting out a small chunk of the force I planned to crack the old man's back with. It feel open, kicking up a cloud of dust as it feel.

"... That works too," commented Camicazi. She shook her head. "But maybe not the best idea to cause a ruckus, not til we're in stabbin' range."

I growled impatiently, but understood. A direct fight would no doubt favor him given our display last encounter. I knew better than to face him again, especially not when I planned on carving him up and leaving him for the scavengers and lawless.

Camicazi led the way forward, being the one more experienced this field and better suited to sneaking. We crept forward, taking slow steps out of the holding cell, approaching the entry ladder. The area was just as decrepit as the our cell, featuring miscellaneous barrels covered in cobwebs. Yuck. There was no sign of the old man anywhere in the hold, leaving us safe for now.

We made our way towards the shaft of light that almost felt like it was pouring from above, our only exit was there. Most likely our enemy was above and by the sound of things he was. I could faintly make out a voice, that of the old mans. He soundedâ€| angry for some reason. He also sounded quite distant, so maybe he didn't notice me breaking down a door.

"You hear that?" Camicazi whispered.

I nodded.

It sounded like there was an argument going on up there, but I couldn't hear the other speaker. "You said that all I would need to do was breach the door, but you never told me how!" I heard the old man shouting.

Camicazi turned to me. "Think he means the door we saw him poundin'

on earlier?"

I nodded.

I heard Mildew speak again, "Well, why wouldn't I have access? What do you mean I am not valid!? How I am supposed to get inside then!"

"Hm, musta contained some valuable lootâ€|" muttered Camicazi. "Most doors well guarded like that typically do."

Yes. If someone like Mildew was having a hard time accessing it, the door itself might have been enchanted. Most likely, whatever was inside was more so, perhaps even some sort of weapon; I think that's how the reasoning for "Viking treasures" worked if their stories were true.

We inched closer. Camicazi stuck her head out of the longship and spied on the old man. I couldn't see him myself, but I didn't dare risk exposing my large head just yet. "Don't see who he's talking to," said the Bog Burglar. "Or hear anything."

I frowned. I couldn't hear the other speaker either. But based on the volume being let out by the old man, his compatriot should have been at least audible. Why couldn't we hear him at all?

"You're supposed to help me!" shouted the old man. "Now, help meâ€| What do you mean that I should look to the side?"

I grabbed on Camicazi's skirt and yanked her back down into the hold; I didn't want her to be blasted by lightning. She landed on the ground, letting out a soft grunt. "Ow!" she complained.

"You!" shouted the old man. "I see you there! Set out and show yourself!"

I grimaced. So much for our plan of hoping to get the drop on the old man. I turned to Camicazi who also seemed to imagine the same prospects I had. This was not good.

"We gonna have to make the most of it, here and now, ya?" she asked.

I nodded. One last chance. Maybe we'd get luck.

But just as soon Camicazi and I were about to leave the hold and stand on the top deck, we heard Mildew speak again. "How could you have survived? You should be a smear!"

"I don't know," said the other voice.

I blinked and turned towards Camicazi, knowing she knew as well as I who that was.

"Toothless?" was the question on both of our lips.

Toothless was still alive.

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They weren't here either. The camp was abandoned, but there was no sign of Stormfly or Camicazi anywhere on the beach. All that remained were our supplies and out sleeping mats against the sand. Small bags attached to Stormfly's improvised harness held most of our extra food and supplies, all safely secure.

It looked like nearly everything was untouched since last night, as if no one had come since we left and fought the old man.

I felt an awful feeling creeping into my chest, worry that maybe, just maybe the girls were not going to be coming back on their own. Mildew must have done something to them and I didn't know what possibility was worse. Would it have been better for him to kill them outright just what he tried to do with me, or was some horrible fate awaiting them should they still be alive? That was not something that needed to be thought of.

But another feeling from a little bit lower on my body had a different thing to say. I planted my new sword into the ground and then rummaged through our supplies.

In retrospect I probably should have put more thought than just packing bread and water, but I had never assumed I would have the rest of my friends wellâ€¦ whatever Mildew did to them with his traitorous mitts. It definitely was not going to be good.

I buried those thoughts under some day-old bread loaves and slightly stale water. I might have thought to go navigate back home and call on Hiccup to send an army, but with my cloak no longer working, I couldn't fly. I could probably build a raft, but I doubted I could sail back to Berk aloneâ€¦ and even if I did, what were the chances the old man would still be here? I tore off a chunk from another loaf. No, I had to do something, anything, just on the off chance my friends were still alive. I had to find Mildew and either liberate my friends or if notâ€¦ avenge them.

I pulled open another bag and pulled out something a little more enticing than food and drink. My crossbow seemed like it was in perfect shape, just after some quick checks to see if the firing mechanisms were still working properly. I had about fifteen regular bolts, three explosives, and three of the magic destroying variety; I guess in retrospect, I also should have made more of them after "gifting" the rest to Dagur. Still, this was going to have to do. With my cloak unable to function properly, if I was caught in a fight, I was going to have to fight this battle out as a boy, not a dragon.

That was going to do. I wiped off the crumbs from my mouth and stuffed my cloak where my crossbow supplies were stored; I wasn't going to need it right now.

This island wasn't very big. If I looked around hard enough, I had little to no doubt I would run into someone or something eventually. A quick sweep of the island's shore line might turn something up.

My first stop was the boat the old man took to the island. It was

still there, so I knew Mildew was still around unless he took a different way off the island. But, no, I didn't think he left. He was probably here for whatever was inside that store room I busted into and I doubted he'd know I opened it for him. Hopefully, he'd stay for just a little bit longer.

I circled around the shore a bit further, next running into a small herd of dragons, all of them biting into some rocks to extract some unrefined metals. I recognized a few of them as servants of the Red Death's, their faces familiar enough. I passed by them without making eye contact, though I was certain one of them was looking at me intently.

But the last thing I saw on my trip around the shore caught my attention,.

It was a huge longship, probably older than I was. It was covered from head to toe in barnacles and mold that grew so thick on its hull, I wondered how the thing was still intact with all that extra weight. One of the sides was caved in by rocks, but that entrance was sealed shut by those very same stones. The mast was torn down, its tip resting in the sands and with some weathered wooden planks plastered on top of it to make a sort of improvised boarding ramp.

I approached the ship, wondering who could have belonged to. It might have been the sort of thing I would have wanted for myself.

I didn't have to wonder for long. I learned who the ship's owner was now. "Well, why wouldn't I have access?" I heard the familiar old man shout.

"Not valid," replied another, this time unknown voice.

"What do you mean I am not valid!?" shouted the old man.

"Not valid," replied the other speaker.

"Of course I am valid!" I heard the old man. "How could I not be!?"

"Not valid," the other speaker replied yet again, as if he was incapable of speaking anything else.

"How I am supposed to get inside then!"

The other voice droned the same reply again, as if the old man's frustration did nothing to change his reply. "Acquire access," said the other speaker.

I hid behind the mast just then, realizing that my enemy was right on top of me.

Perfect. Now, I just had to get in range and find a good angle to line up a clean shot; then I could end this before it even began. I took my crossbow and climbed up the boarding ramp. Mildew became more visible with each step. He was on bow of the ship, his gaze looking towards the island's interior. It would have been so easy to take him down, here and now— if a good chunk of his back wasn't covered up by moldy old crates— Besides, who knew who this other person was?

I climbed aboard and ducked behind what was left of the ship's mast. From here, Mildew was in my line of sight and free of any obstructions. I took aim and lined up my shot, but as I did, I noticed that there wasn't anyone here other than us.

"You're supposed to help me! Now, help me!" he shouted, at what was this odd looking helmet that looked very familiar. In fact, I was sure I've at least seen or heard of it before butâ€¦ It was Roman, right?

And then I noticed the glowing lights coming from where the eyes should be, their glow sending up an uncomfortable chill once I realized they were looking right at me. "Look to that side." rasped a voice that seemed to come from nowhere.

"What do you mean that I should look to the side?" Mildew argued, clearly not liking that answer.

I didn't like it either. Thatâ€¦ thing inside the helmet, it saw me. I ducked behind the mast and broke off my attack; I wasn't going to chance it, not right now. I hoped that Mildew wouldn't listen to the helmet's commands or that his eyes were full of cataracts.

"Do it," rasped the helmet again.

"You!" Mildew roared "I see you there! Set out and show yourself!"

I swallowed my fears and stepped outside of my hiding couldn't I just taken the shot while he was off guard? It would have been so much better to do that.

Mildew raised his staff and stepped towards me, letting short lived sparks fly off as if to threaten me with a jolt. "How could you have survived? You should be a smear!" he roared, smacking my crossbow out of my hands.

"I don't knowâ€¦" I admitted. I mean, I was knocked out when I was sent flying last night. I really should have died instead of landing safely, well, nearly safely in a tree rather than anything else. I guess I got lucky, but who really what happened?

The old man's face contorted into a frown; he didn't like that one bit. "Then, I suppose I'll have to finish you off myself!" he raised his staff and was about to smack it against my body like a club.

I evaded that attack and then quickly grabbed onto my crossbow and then pointed it towards the old man.

He laughed, raising his staff and forming a defensive wall of lightning against me as if to show off his own protection. "You think that a mundane weapon like that is going to-"

I fired and the bolt practically shattered his shield upon contact. Mildew recoiled and hid behind the nearest thing he could find. Obviously scared now that he realized that his main method of defense wasn't going to cut it against projectiles that disrupted enchantments. "Oh, I really think they'll kill you just fine!"

He snarled something I didn't understand. "We'll about that!" He then

raised his staff and I felt myself getting pushed back by an invisible force and being thrown onto the ground, dropping my weapon as I was jerked away. I wiped the blurriness in my eyes, it was that same throwing spell he used on me the night before!

"You're not much without your cloak; it's so easy to throw things that weigh less than a hundred pounds," said the old man. He blasted me again, sending me tumbling further back towards the bow. "But then again, I guess without a little bit of magic, shapeshifters are just as vulnerable as everyone else!"

I braced myself as another wave of invisible force slammed into my body. I grunted and felt my back ache. I was getting dizzy and I had no way to defend myself.

But before he could raise his staff to strike me down, he ducked away from a volley of spines as they nearly skewered him.

I blinked, wiping off the blurriness from my eyes. "Stormfly?"

She flashed me a grin. She looked awful, covered in little streams of her own blood and grime, nothing too major, but enough to make me wonder what happened. But I guess the alternatives might have been worse. She was alive. "Come on, get up and finish him!" she roared.

I grimaced. "Maybe we should retreat," I wanted to say, but I doubted Stormfly would listen to that. This was getting hard.

"Hey, mind if I borrow this?" I heard Camicazi, but she didn't wait for a reply. Instead, she launched a bolt over at Mildew's direction, blowing up a chunk of the aft and sending the old man to floor.

"Blast you!" he snarled and thrown more lightning at our general direction. "Shoulda slew you all, instead of keeping you for bargaining chips."

Stormfly leapt in front of me, blocking a jolt and howling in pain as she did.

"Stormfly!" I cried. Not good. That snapped me out of my dizzying haze and I crawled over to the downed Nadder. I didn't even know if she was alive. Oh, please, please, be alive. I dragged her away from Camicazi, mostly because the Bog Burglar definitely had Mildew's attention right now.

Camicazi, hiding behind the old storage crates kept firing blindly and hurling insults. "Hey, over here, you gnarly old excuse for a man! Yeah, pick on someone your own species!"

The old man, thankfully, kept focusing on Camicazi now that he was worked up would a storm. But Camicazi had only so many boxes to keep her safe. She lobbed more bolts and insults and avoided more life threatening blows, but each attack she avoid left the next one even harder to pull off.

But Mildew's frustration only grew and Camicazi's protection only waned. With a single lucky hit, Camicazi was blasted to the floor, holding charred wood in her hands before throwing it. "Oh,

dear!"

"You're finished!" shouted Mildew, triumphantly.

I grimaced. This was bad. We couldn't take him then, we couldn't take him now. Stormfly was down, Camicazi was out of weapons and only had her wits, and all I had with me was that stupid sword I found as a backup weapon. Wellâ€¦, now was a good time for a backup weapon, right? I unsheathed my blade, hoping that maybe just maybe, I might have not been bad enough that I couldn't buy my friends some time. "You better run," I said. "Camicazi, try to find a way to get Stormfly out of here,"

"Butâ€¦ she's big!" complained Camicazi. "It's not like she can fit on my shoulders!"

"You're not getting anywhere!" snarled Mildew. "Shoulda' killed you all when I had the chance!"

Okay, she had a point, but being reasonable wasn't going to cut it right now. "I'll try to buy as much time as I can!" I shouted.

Mildew lobbed another bolt of lightning. I charged.

To my surprise I didn't die.

I don't know what happened and I didn't even realize something happened until my blade made contact against Mildew's staff. He held his weapon with both hands, holding it up against my downward strike. Lightning rippled from the old man's staff in a violent cascade, as if threatening to spill out of his control.

The old man though was stronger than he looked. He forced me off and launched a close range surge of electricity against me. Yet, I didn't die.

I struck his staff again, forcing the old man on the defensive, the lightning under his control shaking violently against his control. What happened? How was I doing any of this? Why wasn't I dead?

"Where did you get that blade?" the old man spoke, his face illuminated by his own power.

"He has access," said the helmet attached to the old man's belt.

We broke contact again and the old man lobbed another surge of lightning right at me. This time, I realized what happened. My hands swung in a motion that had way more finesse and accuracy in it than I doubted I could ever achieve with a sword. It struck the lightning head on and split it as if it was a refreshing stream.

Mildew blocked my attack and prevented me from cutting him down. "That should have been mine to take!" he shouted and threw me off a third time.

"Come on, give it up!" I shouted. It self so strange. My hands practically moved on their own, acted of their own volition. I shouldn't be _this good_; I fact, I shouldn't have been good at

swordplay at all. Well, I wasn't complaining.

I took advantage of my borrowed skills, lunging and parrying with power I shouldn't have had. It wasn't say as good as some of the other swordsmen I knew, but the fact that I could cleave through much of the old man's lightning meant that his substantial range advantage wasn't as insurmountable at all any more.

"No. You give up!" he snarled. He took the helmet from his belt and then wore it. Then raised his staff to lob more lightning.

I expected it to be another jolt for me to cut through, but as soon as the old man dawn that magic helmet, the hairs on my back stood on end and I realized there was something wrong. I raised my sword just in time to catch a blinding torrent of electricity surging right at me, way, way bigger than I could cut. All I could do was hold my sword against it, dispersing what power the old man now wielded against me. The energy was so intense, that with me blocking it, I was being slowly pushed towards the bow.

"Yield!" shouted the old man. "Yield and die!"

"Never!" I shouted back. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I didn't know where my friends were or if they were still here, but I had to make my stand here.

"Then die!" snarled the old man.

"No, you die," hissed a new voice.

From out of nowhere, a, no _the _Whispering Death leapt on top of Mildew.

* * *

><p>In retrospect, if anyone told me I was going to be saved by a dragon today, I think I would have preferred the execution. I was very sure it was going to be a whole lot less painful than said dragon landing right on top of me and crushing like half my bones, but I guess that was probably the Fates or the Norns deciding to balance my account.<p>

I frowned and then turned towards my newâ€| captor, the Night Fury. I knew him as our prisonerâ€| and the one I put in prison. Oh, Jupiter, Oh, Odin, if he went through all trouble of saving my sorry hide without knowing how I wronged him, I think I might sink to all new lows of incompetence.

He was still injured, arrows and spears had pierced his side, but I managed to apply some makeshift bandages to seal the bleeding. He was far more stubborn than even my father or my brothers, choosing to flyâ€| still "save" me while he really ought to have spent the rest of the day recovering. Of course, it wasn't like I could argue with him, what with all of the help he brought along with him.

Around us a detachment of dragons, all different species that the Romans were still arguing whether to accept the Norse names for them or not. How the Night Fury managed to get these dragonsâ€| and their leader to support him, I wouldn't know; I was still learning the ins and outs of that sort of thing. And behind usâ€| was a creature that

could hardly be called a dragon. Maybe a godling or soon to be god was more accurate.

My captor turned his attention over to me, dropping his head towards his chest, giving me a confused look.

"You know, this whole 'saving me' business would be a whole lot betterâ€¦ if you didn't have to keep dangling me by arms, you know!" I shouted. My arms felt so sore, I practically couldn't feel them any more. This was almost as bad as Centurion training involving weights tied to my feet

The Night Fury snorted dismissively and then turned back to his flying. He barked something towards the dragons that flew beside him, an order, a command, maybe?

They responded in kind, a few shouts and draconian cries. They then broke formation and scattered themselves against the four winds.

I raised an eyebrow. Where were they going? And why did the Night Fury send our protection away from us? What practical reason could he have had?

I then became aware that we were approaching an island, somewhere small and remote. As soon as we could, he landed us over a beach. I felt like my shoulders were dislocated from my head and went all the way towards my pancreas. "Maybe next time, you don't go saving me, okay?" I said.

The dragon snorted out a puff of smoke and patted a paw over towards his sides.

"Don't touch those!" I ordered. "You'll cause yourself to bleed again!"

The Night Fury clearly disagreed with that sentiment and quickly tore apart the discarded cloth that bandaged his wounds. He bled, blood dripping from where the spears punctured him. As though he was a beast, he rubbed his tongue against the wounds, sucking up his own blood.

I cringed at the sight. He seemed like a normal guy, but this behavior was a little unexpected.

"Ignacio!" I heard a voice shout, something in Latin.

I turned towards the forest and saw a woman there, holding a child, a mere boy no older than seven, with one hand. Why they were here, I didn't know, but I raised my arms and tried to shoo them away; I don't think now was a good time for bystanders to get involved. "There's a dragon!" I said. "Run while you-"

But instead of screaming at the sight of the dragon, both the woman and what I presumed was her child dashed towards the wounded dragon.

At the same time, the Night Fury brought a paw over his head and then "took off" his disguise, shifting his body back into human form. He then grabbed on to the rushing mother and child, holding them tight. "It's alright! I'm here!" he shouted.

"Daddy!" cried boy. "You're back!" I heard that the Night Fury had fled from Rome all the way up to the North, but now that it was brought up, I don't think it was ever said he was alone, now that I think about. This was his family: wife and son. The boy then broke off and he touched the red liquid that dripped onto his shoulders.

The woman took note of this. "And you're bleeding!" she cried. She broke off from the hug. "I told you, you shouldn't have gone back there; you could have been killed!"

"Well, I had good reason!" yelled the former Night Fury. He then pointed over to me, and then suddenly made me part of what might have been a brewing familial dispute.

"Oooh, who's he?" chirped the boy.

"Well, I was a Roman Prefect" I said.

The boy squinted his eyes, as if disbelieving me. "You don't look like a Prefect." He did have a point; I was held captive and stripped of everything; I practically looked like a homeless wanderer.

"Well, how good of a reason is that?" the woman said, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

I looked over to the woman and winced. The former Night Fury was more obviously threatening since he could turn into a dragon, but I don't think I want to know what that woman was capable of. "He shouldn't have opened his bandages."

"Well, it's good to know that at least one of you can think ahead!" said the woman, eyeing her husband. "What am I supposed to do if you go spend every few days risking your life!"

"You know my injuries are reduced when I shift down" complained Ignacio.

"And how injured were you?" stomped his wife.

"Three spears" I offered.

The Night Fury gave me an annoyed look that almost reminded me of my brothers when I choose not to have their backs when they decided to burn down a few houses. "Fine," he said. "But I needed to remove them to shift out of dragon form, you know this!"

"You can't speak if you're dead!" replied the wife.

Ignacio turned back to me, letting out a frustrated sigh. "Fine, patch me up again."

"**That may not be necessary,**" said a loud booming voice.

I jumped out and landed into the sand of the shore. I kicked myself away, keeping my gaze firmly locked onto the massive creature before me. Right, the lesser dragons were dispersed by an order from the Night Fury; but I did not think about what happened to the greater creature that trailed behind us. Their leader, the vast dragon that

commanded the attack on the Fortress stood right in front of us, laying his massive bulk against the sandy beach.

"**Be not afraid,**" said the massive dragon before us, his many eyes focusing upon each of us as if we all individually earned some modicum of his vast attention.

"Easier said than done!" I replied. Dozens of thoughts went through my head, mostly wondering where this titan came from.

The great dragon let out a laugh, as if amused. "**Quite true," **he admitted, speaking in Latin. It was hard to grasp how such a big dragon could do that. I mean, what kind of dragons speak Latin?

I turned towards the others, wondering their responses.

The young boy reacted in much the same way as I did, hiding behind her mother's dress. The mother in turn held on to her child, keeping him safely secure. It appeared he didn't quite feel safe around the great dragon as much as I did.

The only one that wasn't cowering in fear was the former Night Fury, Ignacio. He stood forward and bowed his head. "My Lord, what is it you desire."

"**Only that you live," **said the great dragon. "**Approach and be restored." **He raised a paw and placed it in the sands before the former Night Fury.

Hisâ€| servant stepped forward and touched the the paw. A strange tingling ran up my spine, one that I recognized as the sign something beyond normal just happen. Ignacio took a step back then and then patted his blood soaked chest, as if inspecting himself. "My wounds are goneâ€|" I heard him murmur.

His wife turned towards the great dragon. "Uhâ€| thank you," she said in a weak voice, almost as if her anger was replaced by a colder sensation.

The giant before us bared his teeth, pleased with himself. "**Worry not, your husband is in good custody.**" Then, the great dragon's gaze shifted over to me.

With all of the dragons eyes over me, I could practically feel the power he wielded. Every single one of my hairs felt like they were turning into pinpricks and my body started to feel the very weight of the Earth on my shoulders. I knew from the get go that the dragon was physically powerful, because obviously, you don't get that big and not squash mountains as a side effect, but with all of his eyes pointed right at me, it was like he was looking at my very soul, reading into the very fabric of my being. It was practically choking to feel that all happening to me.

I raised my hands and went through a variety of gesture; I remember one of them was to ward off evil, but I couldn't remember what it was.

The dragon's eyes shifted away, the intensity I felt receded. He jerked his head away, as if recoiling from hitting a wall and let out an annoyed sounding growl, before letting out an amused chuckle.

***"Interesting, though I would prefer if you did not do that."**

I gave the great dragon a nervous smile. "Uh, sureâ€¦ That was just a reflex." Maybe not a good idea to annoy the dragon who could crush me like a bug.

The great beast snorted out a torrent of smoke that could have covered a village. He turned towards Ignacio. ***"I hope that thisâ€¦ associate of yours was worth the trouble it put you through; you do realizeâ€¦ what his allegiances were beforeâ€¦ rescuing you, yes?"**

"Prefect, uh, Fish here, did spring me out of jailâ€¦"

I rolled my eyes. He still didn't get that that wasn't my real name.

***Even though heâ€¦" **The great dragon turned towards me. I had a very good idea that he was looking at every bead of sweat that dropped off my forehead and an inkling suspicion that he now knew it was my fault that the Night Fury was detained in the first that was ill founded. ***"Serves those who wronged you?" **completed the dragon. I had the feeling he chose to omit something. ***"He has been warned against trusting me."**

"Served," I corrected. The great dragon was right, but at this point I was practically an outlaw myself; I needed whatever help I could get, whether it be from the Vikings who held anti-Roman sentiment... or from a great dragon who could step on me and crush boats while he was at it.. "I was tried as a traitor, so, uh, I'm now an Enemy of the State. I don't really have much choice on who to trust."

Ignacio and his wife nodded in unison, approving of that.

"As we were we," said the woman. "We have been cast out and seek refuge under your â€¦ protection." She seemed to hesitate. I think maybe she didn't fully trust the great dragon.

***Of which I shall provide," **the dragon said. He then turned his head towards the horizon and spoke once more. ***"And it appears you will have need of it quite soon."**

"It's the Roman Navy," cried the Night Fury's wife. "They'll kill us!"

"What? I thought the conscripts took down any ships they could!" shouted Ignacio.

"All the ones at the Fortress, sure" I provided. "But there's plenty of boats all over the Archipelago and my Legate was fond of commandeering anything provided it served a purpose. He probably hired out some mercenaries to make up for whatever casualties they took." Oh, I hope some of my friends in the Legion were still around. I mean, sure I was held captive and nearly executed, but those were just their orders. At the same time though, I really didn't want to fight them.

The King snorted. ***"Intriguing, but it changes nothing." **He turned towards Ignacio. ***"Dawn your other shape; we will go out and meet them."**

"But, but my husband might die if he goes back there!" cried the woman.

"**Worry not,**" said the great dragon. "**He-" **he also turned to me **"- and his associate will only need to watch what happens. I believe they deserve to witness a demonstration."**

I blinked. "What kind of demonstration?"

"**You will see.**"

Ignacio dawn the hood of his cloak once again and shifted back into a Night Fury. Finding no other option and not wanting to displease a dragon to who I was practically a fly to, I decided to go along with hisâ€| plan. Although, this time, I sat on_ top_ of the Night Fury; no more strained arms for me, thanks.

Once those preparations were done, the giant dragon took off with Ignacio and I following right behind him. It was an unbelievable sight, a dragon so big that it practically seemed impossible for it to fly. Yet here it was, flapping its massive wings and leading the way.

In the distance, I saw a fleet of ships emerging from the horizon, coming ever closer into view. I couldn't make the details of them, but I was mostly right. Standardized Roman ships made up the bulk of the core of the fleet, while auxiliary forces, local mercenaries or drafted Viking vessels made up the flanks. It was like watching standard Roman doctrine but applied to naval formations.

I turned to great dragon, wondering what would happen next. He didn't call any of his servants, the other dragons. All there was was on his side were me and the Night Fury and I doubted we could take on a whole navy all by ourselves. What was the great dragon going to do with all this?

As if noticing the question on the tip of my tongue, he turned to me and answered. "**Observe.**"

He then dived forward, getting within range of the ship's siege weapons. I had thought that overestimated himself, had gone crazy and was going to throw himself away. I had read accounts of dragons similar to him in size getting butchered by repeating ballistae, but then again, I don't think any of those dragons held an additional power.

What I thought to be a massacre turned out to be true, only it wasn't the dragon who was doing the dying. From out of nowhere, gigantic waves formed from out of nowhere, capsizing entire columns of ships and knocking men overboard without warning. Massive torrents of flame burst from the great dragon's maw, instantly burning entire ships into ash within moments.

Ballistae fired in desperate attempts to fire at the great dragon, but he was practically untouched with all the chaos that happened bellow, messing with the aim of the seige weapons. Men screamed, their cries calling out to their gods, Roman and Nordic alike for salvation; but it was futile when their opponent might have been a god himself.

I could even make out the shape of my Legate, standing at the bow of his ship, yelling orders the men, maintaining control in the face of an impossibly powerful enemy. Any ships that still survived immediately began turning, hoping to withdraw against such a hopeless battle. All they could do was run.

"**You will all die knowing futility," **declared the great dragon.

And that was when a mountain formed right underneath the ships. It and entire fields of sea stacks surged out from the depths and impaled and stranded every ship that they could get their hands on. Vessels broke and were crushed by the rapid formation of land, leaving whatever surviving men without any ships. Man tried to run at that point, others, mostly Norsemen, saw no other options other than to stand and fight now. Their fates were entirely the same. They burned.

I felt the pit of my stomach grow cold as I saw it all unfold. The great dragon butchered practically everyone I knew in the Legion and I realized realized with absolute certainty that whatever power he wielded against Roman and its forces, could also be used against my home.

The vision ended and soon found myself staring a burning stump of a log. I was back to being myself again, well, my dragon-self at any rate. I saw through the memories of my ancestor, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the First and this encounter left me feeling sick all the way to my stomach. I shook my head; trying to get that feeling away, but I felt it all.

I turned and found my steward, Skullcrusher, the Rumblehorn sleeping against the cliff wall. I wanted to wake him, talk to him. I needed to get through all of that. It was dark now, but I imagine that awaking from the vision was important enough to end his beauty sleep. It was only fair considering that I doubted I could ever sleep again after seeing all that slaughter.

But a voice stopped me from waking him. "So, what do you think?"

I turned and found myself face to face with a Night Fury, one who was so old his darkened scale held an almost silvery sheen. His spinal fins was split down the middle, exposing some sort of glowing light that formed underneath. "Who-" I opened my mouth and then closed it; no, I think I know who he was. "...Grandfather."

The Night Fury's face contorted into a grin, but I had a strange vibe that it was too...vicious to be anything that my long missing grandfather, Old Wrinkly, would ever be capable of. "In a way," he said. "But that is not important."

"Then what is?" I demanded. "What was the point of all of that? Where have you been?"

The elder Night Fury then narrowed his eyes, almost as if he was glaring. Old Wrinkly never glared at anyone, not as I knew him. If he was my grandfather, why was he so not my grandfather? "All in due time, but know this: If you do not slay the King before he fully

regains all of his powerâ€|"

He didn't have to finish. I thought back to what happened to Romans in the vision, about how practically effortlessly he wiped away a whole army by himself. "It'd be impossible."

"No, just improbable," corrected the elder Night Fury.

57. Chapter 57

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I struggled to grasp how it was even possible that thatâ€| Gronckle could have become a Knight. I was fit for it, as was my birthright. Yet like every other time I came close, it was stripped away from me and given to someone far more undeserving. Fishlegs got one lucky hit into me, he was not fit for combat. He wasn't. No, no, no.

Of course, maybe I am expecting too much from a false Flight Commander. Astrid was not truly worth, even if my Lord saw fit to gift her with a draconic form one time. She wasn't one of us, she was not ever going to be like us. It was a facade, something I knew she did because it was convenient. She uses us.

Right now all I wanted to do was leave this place, go somewhere where the deluded members of my Flight and my mad commander would not see me. I had better things to do than waste my time watching over the sleeping and groaning.

I flew, rising over the human fields, sweeping over their homes. Most did not pay attention to me, all constantly lost in their own Herd worries. Gah, I hated being amongst these creatures, especially now.

I traveled as far as I could, until I was off towards the cliff edge. I took refuge somewhere clear, right by the edge, free from dens, dwellings, andâ€| people. It might have been the only place within the village itself that held nothing. Gah, what I wouldn't give to be free of this place, to leave. Oh, the burden that is honor. If it were not wanting to preserve that single shred of nobility I had left, I would be free of this place.

I laid down on my belly, hoping to waste the rest of the day away. At the very least, unlike my brother, I had good reason to do this. No one should bother me here, no one should disturb me.

"Come on, Scauldy!" I heard voices from behind me.

"No!" replied the cry of some random Kin. "Get away!"

I put my left wing over my head, not wanting to listen. Do not get involved.

"Come on! Come this way!" cried a separate voice.

"Uh, you probably shouldâ€|"

"Yeah, safer that wayâ€|" said two Kin voices, one after the other.

Were those that Zippleback?

I shook my head and then put my other wing on top of my head. No, no. Do not listen, not get involved. I had enough today.

"Hey, Firewym!" cried one of the voices behind me.

"Can you, give us a hand here?" said the other.

They noticed me, knew who I was even. I groaned. I shouldn't matter. Ignore them.

I coiled myself tighter and into a clump of myself, burying my head into my chest as deep as I could. Quit bothering me and go away.

"Stop it," cried the lone Kin. "Leave me-

"QUIET!" I howled.

"...Aloneâ€|." completed the other Kin, some no name Scauldron. Probably just one of the random villagers that go turned.

I snorted out a plume of smoke through my nostrils. I was steaming, smoking. I didn't want to deal with this.

Yet no matter what I did those twoâ€| blondes didn't seem to fear my wrath enough to wipe those grins off their faces.

"What is the meaning of disturbing me?" But their blank looks told me that they couldn't understand me. I then turned towards the Scauldron and the Zippleback beside him. "Tell me!" I demanded.

Barf and Belch, as they now called themselves, gave shallow whimpers.

But the Scauldron however shown more spine and emmitte a gruff counter. "I keep telling these four to leave me alone! It's not my fault I can't spend more than two hours out of the water. Especially not since they broke my tub!"

"Eh, sorryâ€|" muttered the two Kin in unison.

I rolled my eyes. Typical. I'm bothered because someone else's problem spilled over to me. "Fine, justâ€| go away."

The Scauldron grunted a little, "Works for me". And then walked away.

"Aw, come back Scauldy!" cried the female Herd. "Pleeaseâ€|"

But the false Kin was wise to ignore her and keep moving.

I turned back to Barf and Belch. "So, why were you bothering a Scauldron?" I groaned. These two wereâ€| different since the last time I met them. About a year ago, they would have been moreâ€| behaved than they were now. They certainly didn't spend their time bothering other KIn. I blame the influence of the humans; it brought them so low.

"Uhâ€¦" grasped Barf.

"Er," struggled Belch.

They turned their gazes to each other, as if to silently converse, like all multiheaded Kin did at this time. "Uh, you remember?"

"No." said the other. "Uh, why were we doing this again?"

The male had a blank look on his face. "Uh, I forget?" he answered.

"Was it something involving a pickle jar?" questioned the female.

I nodded. Clearly, these four were completely hopeless. They disturbed me, clearly sounding like they wanted me to interveneâ€¦ and they completely forget about- Wait, did those Herd just reply to the question asked by one of my Kin? Ah, probably just a fluke. I rolled my eyes. "Forget it." I turned over and faced back towards the cliff side. "Just leave meâ€¦"

"Uh, don't you have to go, uh, help Astrid?" questioned one of the Zippleback heads.

I groaned. "Noâ€¦ She can handle it _herself,_" I said scornfully. Especially with her new Knight. First he beats me, then he takes away what was mine. Gah! "And don't you have to go help out either."

"Well, you go try helping when the others don't reallyâ€¦ want you around," said the other head.

"Hey, well, we tryâ€¦. sometimes, " Okay, that was the Herd male, not one of my Kin.

I was bothered now. I turned my head over and looked the human in the eyes. "How do you do that?"

The human gave me a blank look, pointing at himself. "Youâ€¦ talking to me?"

"Yes!" I said. I mean, I know that Herd turned into Kin understand Kin, and I know Kin turned into Herd understand Herd; and whatever part of the powers that changed one into the other also made it so that once you changed, you understood the other sideâ€¦ forever. I wish that wasn't so, but that's how it was. But for all intents and purposes, I know that these two Herd have never been Kin, false or otherwise! "How are you able to talk to each other?"

"Uh, what's Firewrym looking at you for? Is it that ugly wart again?" said his sister.

"Hey! My face is perfectly fineâ€¦" But then scratched the clean seeming forehead of his, as if doubting. He turned. "I don't know what she wants."

I rolled my eyes and was about to promptly turn back to my rest.

"Hey, uh Barf, what's she asking about?"

"Uhâ€¦ that's hard to say," said one of the Zippleback heads..

"Well, tell us!" instructed the female.

I blinked. She was capable of listening the Zippleback speak too? How? They were never Kin!

"Well, uh, we don't know much either," admitted one of the heads, looking at me as if to make sure I was listening in.

Iâ€¦ moved my head up and down. This conversation feltâ€¦ weird.

"She wonders why, well, you know, can talk to us while weâ€¦ like this," said the other head.

The twins nodded as if they were thinking on it.

One of them, the male turned to look at me and let out a laugh. "Oh, that's easy; we just do it!"

"You just...do it...?"

Both of the Zippleback heads nodded in reply, as if seemingly and totally convinced that that was sufficient answered.

I had no idea what to think about that. The idea that there were Herd capable of understanding Kin at all just seemed outlandish, but they were having an entire conversation was just insane. And this was coming from all of the transfigurations I've witnessed; how was this possible?

The female then let out a sickening laugh. "Oh, wow, she's slow!" she let out.

"Well, duh, that's because we're total geniuses!" said the brother. "With a capital 'Je'!"

I â€¦ was fairly sure that was wrong. "Then why can't you understand me at all?" I blurted out. "Answer meâ€¦"

"Uh, what to do you want?" asked the female.

I groaned. "Justâ€¦ go bother someone else." I wasn't getting answers was I? I coiled myself back into my oval shape and then laid my head against the dirt. At least the dirt I could trust me to make sense when I needed it to. Like when I needed to ram my head against the dirt.

"Uh, okay," someone muttered. I didn't pay attention enough to know who.

I heard their noisy footsteps grow distant, finally someone listened. Finally I could be alone.

"Oh, hey Snotlout!" I heard one of the human.

"What're you doing here?" said the others.

"Hello-"

"Hookfang," said the Zippleback heads.

"Uh, helloâ€|" replied my brother in a hushed tone. His voice was tooâ€| soft, too human.

"Yeah, helloâ€|" said the other, currently not Nightmare. "Uh, we're just passing throughâ€| uh Firewrym?"

Gah. And just when I thought that I wouldn't be interrupted someone comes to replace my previous tormentors. At the very least, I could see that the other Herd and that Zippleback were going to be out my horns for the rest of the day. "What is it?" I groaned, turning my head slowly to the approaching duo.

Snotlout was the same as yesterday, though I think his cheek was partially covered in more scale than the previous day. It looked like he had a cut and the replacement skin formed around where the wound had been. "Uh, we've got your things!" he tried to sound more excited than he actually looked.

Hookfang stood next to him, dressed up in that awful and disgraceful human guise of his. Of course, I'd expect him not to show pride about our lineage. He was a bit of a black sheep to begin with. He held a bundle of clothes with a silvery amulet on top, one of those things that would force me into human form. "Uh, our host wants you to be ready for dinner soon."

I felt like picking them up and throwing them off the cliff, scattering them until I couldn't see them any long. I hated the idea of turning human, but it was required of me by my Host, Snotlout's father. And he was easily better than my false Flight Commander! It's not like he stole something that belonged to me. And besides, I was a Lady; I had to conduct myself respectfully to the people that mattered. I just pointed to put it somewhere on the floor around me. "Just place it somewhere, anywhere."

My brother did so, putting away those human belonging I despised some feet away from me, placing a weight on it to keep them from flying off. "Well, they're over here if you need them, you sure you aren't better off just, you know, changing right now?"

Again he ask me that. Doesn't he know by now? "No." I planned to stay in this form as long as I could. No sense just shifting to thatâ€| body when I didn't want it.

"It's getting late, I mean. Sun set's nearing," said my brother.

"Well, it's kind of a bad idea for it, I mean, out here and all."

Oh, right, that human obsession with clothing every inch of their bodies. I don't understand how it worked. It was perfectly fine for one of them, as a dragon to be unclothed, yet why did they care so much about it when they were not? Such nonsensical creatures. I shook my head. At least, Snotlout has the decency to let me pick my own time. "Fine, fine, I'll go and change, but not just

yetâ€| "

"Okayâ€| " brother muttered. He did something odd, glancing around at every which way, as if to ask who was watching. "Sister, I know you don't like any of thisâ€| "

"Understatement, brother, understatement."

"But it's not all bad, being human at least," he replied.

What? That was a silly notion. Being human was like being reduced to something lesser; there is a reason that our King labeled them as beasts. "Whatever gives you that ridiculous notion?"

I saw Snotlout cringe, as if the question I posed bothered him too.

I turned towards him. "Well, what kind of advantage would one get being human than being more superior Kin? I lose so much strength and ability justâ€| being one, I hardly see it is as worth it."

The two remained silent, exchanging glances. "Well, over there, you're a Nightmare..." began my brother.

I nodded. Of course, that bit of information is self evident. "Well why wouldn't I be a Nightmare?"

"But over here," continued my brother. "You're Firewrymâ€| as much as people find your name weird, that who you are."

I blinked. "What? What does having a name have to do with anything?"

My brother rolled his eyes. "Iâ€| don't think you'd get it." He then turned and began walking away.

"Come back here!" I rose. The idea that my brother knew something and was hiding it from me, drove me angry. What nonsense was he trying to feed me?

Yet brother still refused to come back, refused to explain himself.

I thumped my tail against the ground. Gah, so infuriating. I was the smarter one, the one that actually tried to do all of the training, and the one to try to make a place for myself in the King's Court; yet he was always the favorite. So unfair.

Snotlout approached me and placed a hand onto my neck.

I half snarled.

"Maybe it'd be a good time to head home, you know, talk to Dad about things."

I snorted out a small plume. Yes, that'd be much better than talking with my brotherâ€| Maybe I can convince my host to throw him out of the table for a night. I had no doubt that what my brother tried to tell me was utter nonsense; I failed to see how it was applicable to me or anyone else at all.

* * *

><p>Where was Hiccup? He seemed to have disappeared, as all of my closest allies have been ought to do as of late. Did Stormfly leaving me set a trend? But at least, Stormfly had the decency to tell me where she was going. Myâ€| maybe mate lacked that courtesy. Still, if I saw either one, I needed to set the matter straight.<p>

I growled to myself. He must have gone into hidingâ€| again. There was enough commotion in the village to cause him to leave without warning. And Thunder's Windstorm said that he wanted to lay low for a while. Still, why couldn't he have just done the truly smart thing and stayed under my protection? I certainly could fend off a few angry layabouts!

"Astrid?" called my closest Knight.

I turned towards him, causing him back away, body leaning towards the ground in an uneasy expression.

I then realized that my tail spikes were all unfurled and then promptly closed them. "Yes?" I asked.

"Uh, a good chunk of the first the villagers are starting to wake, but we'll, the others, our Kin, well, they're getting interested in them." answered my might not have been my first choice or at all what I would consider a warrior, but he had his uses. He seems to have gotten used to many of the problems of being Kin.

I felt like just laying down, as if a heavy weight was placed upon top of me. I think we all knew this was going to happen eventually, but for the longest time, me and my friends had long kept the He-humans from learning too much about what natural Kin were truly like or how it was they lived. For the most part, those who had been turned into Kin had stayed away from true Kin and I kept my Flight a safe distance from them in turn. But hiding the charade grew only more impractical every day, as every now and again, my Flight would ask about the false Kin who lived on the island or in at least one case, speak to them and ask all sort of bewildered questions. Now it was truly inevitable. False Kin would meet true Kin.

And from there, they would learn the truth of some of my close allies and where exactly they came from. We kept them safe from suspicion by lying about where they truly came from and we never really told anyone about the real nature of my King, that monster, because letting everyone know that would definitely cause a great deal of unrest. Now, those secrets might be now impossible. If Hiccup's rule was already difficult as it was, I seriously doubted it would get any easier maintaining that with the knowledge that he harbored enemies to the Tribe for months and that our primary opposition was a massive dragon that could crushâ€| homes with a single foot with a vested interest in him. Plenty would try to overthrow him and leave him to our enemy with that knowledge.

I turned my head skyward, looking up at the darkening skies. Hiccup wasn't back yet and I doubted he would come if he still thought there was a mob out to get him. I sighed and turned to my Knight.

He quivered again, but this time put more effort into standing

without recoiling away.

"Gather the rest of the Flight, we will need to introduce them to our new charges; order them bring them food and drink from our stocks."

"Uhâ€¦| alright," Fishlegs seemed hesitant.

I growled in a low tone, causing him to change his mind in an instant. He left me dashing as fast as he could with his stubby legs.

I hated that I had to do that, but I time was at the essence. Without Hiccup, it came to me to ultimately ensure that tensions were kept to minimum when my Flight encountered the false Kin. There was also the matter about determining if there were to follow my command or not, but that was most likely redundant; they already served Hiccup anyways.

I made my way back to the field of rags and slowly shifting bodies. As per my instructions, my Flight was hefting raw fish and water, using their mouths as would humans use their tiny baskets. They deposited food and drink into nearby troughs, ready to be consumed.

Many of the false Kin were nearly complete with their changes, almost entirely appearing like natural Kin. Some were even already done, but still remained in a daze.

Yet, it soon became clear that they were stirring, the sound of my Flight working away to provide them meals likely rousing them from slumber.

And then, there was a frightened scream, a high pitched wailing noise.

I turned towards the source of noise, a youngish male Nadder was coiling away from â€¦| Terror. Gah, this was embarrassing being the same breed as him. Despite outmassing the little Kin by a massive margin, he was still startled. He babbled, making nonsense noise, trying to pronounce a word that didn't exist in his new native tongue.

The Terror, also startled by the larger Kin, darted off and towards the supply line ferrying food nearby. That made the situation even worse. As he did so, he ran through the legs of Kin much larger than him, and the other Kin, not wanting to step on their comrade instead tried to work around himâ€¦| which as experience with the twins has taught me, tended to cause an even bigger disaster. Kin bumped into each other, causing _those _Kin to bump into those next to them, which caused further problems. In all, the entire line collapsed into a giant mound of wet and fish covered Kin. Several of the troughs were even turned over as a result.

And to make matters worse, several of the false Kin were stirred by the calamity. New heads rose and saw the mess that lied before them. Some of the braver changed rose to get a closer look. Others meanwhile took notice of their new bodies, uttering disappointment at suffering from their predicament a second time.

I cringed at the sight. This was not good. I had to ensure that first contact went well, but was I supposed to do that? I growled and stepped forward.

The answer? I had to lead. "Skitter Leaf," I called out to the small Kin that caused this whole mess. As part of the naming process, I kind of made it a point to recall several of the more unusual members of my Flight. In this one instance, it was one of the few Terrors I had under me.

From out of the pile of my collapsed Flight, popped out a little head. "Yes, Flight Commander?" Though he did not bring himself out even further.

"Apologize to Nadder; you startled him.," I said in the firm tone.

"Uh, but he's uh," his eyes darted towards the Nadder who was attempting to use his coverings as a shield, also unsure.

"Do it; you caused this mess," I reminded, stepping forward towards the pile of bodies. Now, everyone Kin and false Kin had their attention placed solely on me. How I handled this matter would set the stage for how my Kin and the false Kin interacted and from there, how Herd and Kin would see each other.

The small Terror gulped, almost afraid to leave. He uttered something underneath his breath, probably a weak half hearted apology.

"Louder."

The timid Kin eventually got out of his little hiding spot, mostly because the other Kin got out of the way, exposing him. Eventually, my gaze convinced him to go to the frightened Terror that still huddled up in cloth. "Uh, sorry, for, uh frightening you," said the tiny Kin.

The Nadder gave him an uncomfortable look and then turned to me, uncertain.

I reminded him who I was, just to establish my trust worthiness. "I am Flight Commander Astrid. You should know who I am."

"Oh," said the Nadder. "Uh, yeah, I do."

"Then, I recommend you respond to Skitter Leaf here," I said. Now, I'm really starting understand what things were like when I was a small child and I kept having disputes with other children. Because right now, I felt like I was the parent having to sort this mess out. Come to think of it, the two Kin involved can't really have been that old; maybe in the same age group as I was in.

"Uh, rightâ€|," he said and then turned to the dragon, hesitating a little. "Uh, sorry for uh, shoutingâ€|"

The tiny Kin gave an uncomfortable grin, but I saw his body lose some of its nervous energy. "Uh, no problem..."

"Good," I said. Hopefully that was going to defuse the conflict

before it began.

I turned towards the other Kin in the Flight had mostly managed to pull itself together at this point, hovering just behind me, awaiting orders. Directly opposite of them, the former Herd had managed to assemble themselves in a scattered group, it looked like half wondered about running while the other half wanted to stand their ground when faced with their foes. How about neither of those things happening?

I turned back to the Nadder. "Are you hungry? Thirsty perhaps?"

"Well, now that you mention itâ€¦" But the Nadder looked uneasy at the sight of my Flight, clearly intimidated.

But I didn't let that stop me. As I wanted to work a foundation with uneasy enemies, I thought it would be best to improve a situation that ended badly. "Skitter Leaf, why don't you get this one a fish, something nice and tasty."

"Uh, okayâ€¦" cried the little Kin. He flew off and before long he came back and deposited a fish almost as big as he was.

"It'sâ€¦ raw," said the Nadder. "Are you sure it's good?"

"Well, of course I am!" said the little Terror. Then as if to prove a point, he bit off a chunk of the fish and chewed on it before offering the rest. "Smell it."

Hesitantly, the Nadder bent his neck down and smelled it. "It's fishyâ€¦ I normally don't eat food raw."

"Herd don't," I informed him, reminding them I was still there. "You are among Kin now. We offer you food, go and eat." It was an unfortunate thing that during the first time many were turned into Kin, they chose to stick as close to their human habits. Eating cooked meals was one of them. It was a minor thing, really, but if I could break that one habit, if only just for a little while, that might build a little sympathy between my Flight and them.

The Nadder looked at the offered meal one last time, clearly wondering if this was the right decision. He then took the fish into his mouth and then began chewing through it. "It tastesâ€¦ different, not bad." He turned towards the Terror. "Uh, thanks."

"Yeah, no problemâ€¦" muttered Skitter leaf.

I raised my head and then turned back to the Kin that surrounded us. The mood seemed to shift to one of even more indecision, more uncertainty. No one, seemed to have an idea what should be done here, not after the demonstration I pulled off. "Why don't the rest of you bring some food to these new Kin of ours," I suggested towards my Flight.

"But they were uh, not Kin until just now..." said one of the others amongst my Flight.

I didn't even pay attention to who it was. "It doesn't matter what they were before; I was like them too. They are our Kin right now,

that's what matters."

Several cried in outrage, but they were drowned out by the still uncertain mass of other their fellows following my orders. Most just offered to ferry food towards their new companions; others simply chose to lead the former Herd towards the stocks directly.

This was good. I turned a disaster into something of an opportunity. Now all there was to do was capitalize on it even more. I turned back towards Skitter Leaf and the Nadder. "Why don't you two get to know each other little bit more."

No longer as hesitant now that he had some food in his stomach, the Nadder crawled out his sheet and rose. "Uh, okay, well, my name isâ€¦"

I left them before he could finish.

"That gone better than expectedâ€¦" I heard Fishlegs from behind me.

I turned and found my two direct Knights beside me. I smirked. "Well, that's because you expected things to go poorly," I told them. I laughed. "Okay, I'll admit we got lucky."

Meatlug nodded. "But are you sure it's a good idea to let them talkâ€¦ about everything?"

I cocked a grin. I think spending time around Hiccup might have clued me into his way of handling things. "No," I admitted. "But I don't think we have much of a choice."

I could have easily forbade my Kin from speaking too much about their lives or before serving me or of anything involving my friends, but I figure at this point it was better to actually be honest for once. I had no doubt that eventually something would slip and the humans would eventually learn what we have been hiding. And I seriously doubted speaking different languages would hinder the false Kin from informing the humans; plenty of them could write especially since literacy was nearly mandatory. No, it was time. We should let the humans know about who it is we were and that despite all that, we were allies. And just the same, my Flight needed toâ€¦ integrate better; seeing the False Kin as their own would eventually get them to warm up to the idea that the Herd would be more than animals, at least that was the hope. It didn't matter if we were different; I made friends among both sides and we got along just fine.

And maybe, just maybe, we would be rewarded for showing that trust. If I was wrong, I end up a cautionary tale like my Uncleâ€¦ But if I am right.

"Lady Flight Commander!" cried a voice. I turned. It was one of my messengers, back from the mission.

"Good, anyone catch you?"

"Nope!" said the Kin. "I met with theâ€¦ target and uh,"

"Good, don't speak any more."

Fishlegs raised an eye towards me. "Uh, Astrid, what's this about."

"Nothing much," I told him. He didn't need to know, not yet anyways. And come to think, neither did my boyfriend. "Don't tell Hiccup either."

"Uh... is this a secret?" Fishlegs asked.

"No," I said. "There is no this _at all_." In short "no", means "yes".

He turned towards Meatlug, clearly wanting to know what was going on.

She gave a shy grin. "Sorry, can't say. Try not to get involved."

I sighed. I guess didn't need to keep the secret about my King's true nature or of who my friends were before they came to Berk; no, I had a much more important secret to keep hidden.

I just hope Hiccup would understand. Though, I think it was time I learned the secret of where he's been going off to.

58. Chapter 58

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

Who was my grandfather, really? This dragon could not be him. His gaze was too sharp, his posture too rigid. It felt like I was looking down the glare of a snake rather kindly world weary eyes. His presence was unsettling and held an air that felt like it was charged with... something, electricity, sorcery, just raw unfettered fury?

This Night Fury... was not my grandfather and it wasn't his being a dragon that made that impossible. No, my grandfather professed to that in his letter he left Gothi; he was part of the big Night Fury centric family secret and the reason why Mom, Toothless, and I were also involved.

I hadn't known my grandfather all that much, since disappeared when I was just a boy, still trying realize what separated me from the other kids. Yet, I remembered enough to get a picture. He was a kind man, the sort of fellow that even though you really questioned his medical expertise, you at least knew he wasn't going out of his way to hurt you. He told stories that I enjoyed, he gave me advice when I was feeling down... I was not expecting this dragon to give any of that to me and I certainly doubted he cared for doctoring.

"You saw his power and now you understand," said the Night Fury, his eyes meeting mine with a fiery look. "The King must be slain before the final restraints of his prison fail."

I gulped. If the King ever used power like what he did in the vision again, I shuddered to think what would happen to Berk. I... understand why my ancestor felt he had to stop him. Did I have the will or resolve to attempt that? I shook my head. "But why can't we

try reasoning with him?"

The Night Fury before me growled right up in my face. The split between his spine shot up with short bursts of lightning. It was as if the very notion offended him. "You cannot! I forbid it!" he declared.

I felt like trying to crawl away, the dragon's piercing gaze felt like it was piercing my very soul. How could he be my grandfather?

The Night Fury broke eye contact first and then dispassionately turned toward the discarded burning log that I knew for certain was his creation. He gazed intently at the flames that danced in the leftovers. He had this look in his eyes, the kind I vaguely remember from when I watched my grandfather performing whatever rituals needed doing. Was he divining? Seeing the future as a soothsayer should?

I moved toward him, cautious in case he would try striking me yet again. I wondered what could have happened to him, what could have changed him to be like this. I don't remember too much about my grandfather— then again, I might have been too young to remember everything; I could easily have opted not to remember the bad parts when my grandfather disappeared.

The Night Fury's ears twitched and then his vision came back to me. "When I served the King, he told me his plans for the future."

Served the King? Was it _also_ family tradition for everyone to work under that massive dragon? Well, then again, I heard Night Furies were involved in raids against Berk for at least a hundred years back. Maybe grandfather was the one before Mom— I shook my head. Not the important thing here Hiccup. "What plans?"

My not-grandfather turned, his eyes turning into a hard glare, his voice bitter. "He would have planned to build himself a — nation."

I squinted my eyes. "But— aren't there lots of Enclaves all over? All of them forming alliances, unions, not unlike—"

"You Herd," he completed, as if to mention that he was— not human. "That is not what I mean," he said. "The Herd and Kin of the Archipelago are far too fractious, divided for the King's liking. It would have been an— Empire, not like the one the Sons of the Wolf built for themselves."

Sons of the Wolf? I think the King used that once or twice, though I never really got who he was referring to. I— doubted it was another Tribe and I doubted they had anything to do with Fenrir. "Who?"

The elder Night Fury rolled his eyes. "Honestly, why didn't he teach you such things—?" he muttered whilst slowly cutting letters into the earth.

I wonder who he was talking about. Did he mean my Dad should have told me this. I look down and saw the word 'ROME' etched into the dirt.

"They are called the Sons of the Wolf simply because their founders were raised by one; it is their primary title." He sighed. "Honestly, should know by now how to speak their tongue."

I let out an uneasy grin. For the first time in ever, I actually felt well judged about what brains I lacked. It felt odd, normally, I had a mental advantage maybe I could try to make up for it? "So, the King wants to make a nation that rivals them?" I wondered.

"Precisely," said my grandfather, sound a little less disappointed. "While he remains bound to his prison, he lacks the physical and political clout to unite the Enclaves under his wings and as well as the reserves to go on a campaign against the Herd in the Archipelago." He then turned up to the stars, observed them a minute and then turned back towards to me. "In approximately, sixty seven hours, thirty two minutes, and nineteen seconds, the final restraints holding him will break."

I gulped. As impressive as it was for him to get a precise time like that, that was just under three days, probably just after lunch. And once that happened, how could I ever stop the King then? He could practically go to Berk himself to do whatever he wanted and I doubted there was anything any of us could do to stop it, other than try to throw ourselves into his throat in an attempt to choke him. "I saw what he could do. How am I supposed to compete with a Kin who can cause mountain ranges to appear from the sea!"

The Night Fury hissed. "I do not know that; you must figure it out for yourself."

"But why not you?" I shouted. "You know him, you must have. I bet you were even Flight Commander." It seemed like a good guess, the King had this weird habit of playing favorites towards Night Furies.

"I cannot oppose him," he spat bitterly. He then shook his head. "But the reason why is ultimately something I cannot reveal."

"Is there anything you can reveal?" I shouted. "You left me! You never told me about any of this; not of my Mom, the fact that I had a brother or the fact it was pretty much set in stone I was going to end up a Night Fury eventually."

"You weren't old enough!" he barked back. "You were five! Barely above a hatchling. You would never have understood."

"Then what about my Dad?" I replied. I don't know what got into me, but I think I had some resentment over my grandfather just leaving me without explaining anything. I guess some part of me was still a disgruntled five year old wondering why I had so few relatives. "Shouldn't he have at least learned about what he was getting into?"

"Him?" He spat. "I would have preferred my sole daughter mated with someone else more fitting. One of the things the King and I still agree upon was the mistake of allowing him to be wed to her."

"Last I checked, people say you were gave them your blessing and performed the ceremony," I replied.

My grandfather snorted. "In a completely different state of mind I assure you..." He sighed. "Hiccup, I am sorry that I had to leave you behind. I did try and leave someone trusted to inform you once you were ready for the news."

"Which happened after Mom and Dad were taken hostage, the island was attacked by my father's worst enemy, and long after I learned about Mom and Toothless." Okay, so maybe he had a point, but Gothi giving me a letter in a sealed envelope to set off that reveal didn't really help me as much as it could have.

"Toothless?"

"It's my little brother's name."

"... not the name I would have gone for." he commented and shook his head. "Regardless, how was I supposed to know I would be off by several months?"

"You could see into the future! How could you be late about giving me a message?"

"Well, obviously someone wanted the message to come after a tragedy," he sounded very obviously sarcastic. "I at least was right about your brother eventually running into my basement. The point is, I tried!"

I opened my mouth and then closed it. How was I supposed to respond to that? In that very moment, my grandfather, well, didn't seem like some upset Night Fury, not really. Especially since I had no idea how soothsaying worked. he didn't exactly have a good track record according to Gobber; maybe that applied to setting up his plans. "... What would have you done?"

"Were things different, I would have at least ensured that you got a proper education in foreign subjects, tongues and cultures especially. Certainly, you would have probably been informed about your lineage much sooner, perhaps when you would have met your brother for the first time, you would have been his equal instead of his hunter or if done far enough, his playmate."

That was a creepy thought. What if I did know about being descended from dragons from the very beginning? And what if I actually turned into a Night Fury when I was a child? Would Mom have ever signed up with the King's forces if she knew I would visit every now and again? Would my brother and I have gotten along? So much could have happened

"I would have also made sure that One Eye did not go into a trap and would have ensured that he survived his encounter with the Usurper's forces. It would have been a difficult encounter, but my aid, victory was all but guaranteed."

Also unsettling. I only met One Eye once, right before his fateful battle against Alvin the Treacherous. I know that he was the mentor figure for most of my friends, their teacher, their commander. If he was alive what would have happened? "Was he close to you?"

The elderly Night Fury bowed his head in an expression of sheer devastation and grief. "More than you realize" he uttered in a

sorrowful tone. "He knew of my unique condition since I was a child."

I nodded. I didn't know him long, but I imagine that if old One Eye was that trusted and knew my grandfather for that long, he must have been something close to a brother, maybe even to a degree more than me and Toothless since we definitely never knew each other for as long.

And then as if to remind me that the grandfather I once knew was completely different from the one before me..."If you ever find the Usurper, bite off his head, hang it overneath a gorge, and then burn the rest of his body inside out!"

"... Okay" I replied. That was a morbid image. I really wonder what happened to my grandfather to make him like this. Was I really just remembering an idealized image from being so young?

He sighed. "Did he at least share with you the prophecy I gave him?"

"Uh, I think Toothless said something about that " On the morning after One Eye died, my brother said that he told him something bizarre about fangs and hearts, something utterly nonsensical and that made no sense even to me. At the time, I really didn't understand why the Nightmare felt that they were so important to share with his final breath. But if it was a prophesy...

My grandfather nodded, seeming to approve. "Well, at least you know about it. I know you've been gathering the pieces."

I blinked. "What pieces?"

The Night Fury before me growled. "Ugh, you should have known this by now. I should have prepared you for this, but _he _wouldn't let me." He was clearly upset about someone else, someone I didn't know, but I doubted that whatever feelings he had would stay confined to whoever "he" was. "So instead I spend the next ten years on a fruitless goosechase because he felt ashamed over _my _daughter, but it was his fault in the first place!"

"Uh, not that I want to interrupt your...venting." Which I did. Oh, why was my grandfather like this? Did he go senile since I last met him? "But, uh, can you explain what it is I am supposed to have?"

"You know!" the Night Fury declare. "The shards, the pieces of . fang. You have one."

"Fang?" I really doubted I've been collecting teeth all that much. Well, except for maybe my own. And I was sure I had more than one of those.

"No, no!" my grandfather slapped himself with his paw. "A a weapon, that's what you need! A weapon The one that slew the Corrupted One! You have one of the pieces?"

"Corrupted One?" I think Toothless said something about that. Like everything else, it was completely meaningless.

"Ugh, did your father fail to teach you even your historyâ€¦ even as foolhardy Herd history is?"

I blinked. So, the reason why Toothless and I couldn't really piece together what it was was due to the fact that it was all supposed to be in Norse? Is that what my grandfather was saying? "Which history? I don't understandâ€¦."

Grandfather turned to the still snoring body of Skullcrusher, his gaze one of annoyance as if the Rumblehorn also had other messages that needed delivering. "I suppose no one else does, not with the convoluted nature of our tongues being translated incompletely." Sighing, he turned back to me. "Listen, this weapon, this fang. You can remake it and thus wield itâ€¦"

"And use that weapon to defeat the King?" That certainly sounded appealing. After wondering about how I was supposed toâ€¦ defeat an enemy that was much bigger than me in the first place. I mean, it's not like it was going to be as easy as attacking the King from a single weak point, right? But there was a problem aside from the fact I still didn't know what it even was. "How am I supposed to wield it?"

"Excuse me?" my grandfather's eye narrowed.

"I'll admit that being a Night Fury probably was one of the more enjoyable things that happened to me in a long while." Then I raised my paw and showed him to it. "But I don't exactly have thumbs right now."

My grandfather struck a thoughtful pose. "Thatâ€¦ is a good point really."

Which was bad. If this "fang" was Nordic in origin, that likely meant that I had to hold it to use it. Or even hold it to reforge it. I guess maybe Toothless could hold it, unless I could figure out a way to turn myself back into a boy in the next three days.

Then my grandfather shrugged and then he pushed a piece of metal towards my feet. "Either way, take this. This is the piece I have. I went through a lot of trouble getting it, but I know this weapon will play a pivotal role in your battle, that much I have seen."

"Good to see you have so much confidence in me, grandfather." Because his soothsaying was so one hundred percent accurate and all. I looked down at the metal. It looked like some sort of bronze lump that I couldn't make the shape out of. Was it melted? "How am I supposed to use this?"

"Figure it out." The Night Fury grunted. "And watch it, child. I'm still upset in your choice of mate!"

I raised an eyebrow. I didn't exactly have a "mate" per say, but what I had was close enough. "You mean Astrid? When, when did you hear about that?"

He rolled his eyes. "Honestly, you haven't figured it out yet?"

I turned over to the still sleeping Skullcrusher. Well, given what little I know, he seemed like the most obvious bet for feeding my

grandfather informationâ€| that or his soothsaying. Maybe it was a little more accurate than I realize. "I have an ideaâ€|"

He rolled his eyes. "I would have preferred you'd find a nice Night Fury femaleâ€|"

"Because the island is so full of them. Granddad last I checked, the only females I met were my Mom..."

He sighed. "Well, at least when you settled for a Nadder at least you picked a pretty one with at least enough sassâ€|" He then shook his head. "But that's not what bothers me."

"It's not?" Suddenly, I felt my knees start to shake, as if I realized he was about to say something that would bother me.

"I know of the King's deal with that maiden," said the Night Fury. "That's the talk of the Enclaves for the past few months, about how a Herd female became a Nadder and fought in a challenge; I also know of her visitation to the King to have you healed from a maiming and thus offered something in exchange for that service. Such events did not occur in a vacuum, it spread."

"Yeahâ€|" It occurs to me that all of them happened in public. While I was sure that most dragons didn't understand what really transpired during those events, I was certain maybe some were close enough and had enough eyesight to make out a loose picture. Eventually, something had to leak and my grandfather was probably one of the only people who could interpret it all. _That _made me uncomfortable, since that meant he knew something I didn't.

"So, then let me ask you this," began my grandfather. "What if thisâ€| connection between you and the female is not genuine, but rather a manipulation on behalf of our enemy."

"But Astrid's myâ€| mate," the words gasped out of my mouth, but as I said it, I realized that there might have been something he had been getting at.

"Right now, certainly, but I know the King must have been tampering with her head," declared the Night Fury, his tone bitter as if having experience on it. "I wonder if when she struck her deal, that the King would nudge her behaviors and perceptions to better fit some intended vision for her."

I thought back to all of the various slip ups Astrid had in the past few weeks about using dragon based terminology in Norse, or about encouraging more dragon like behavior. She certainly seemed to adapt to the role of Flight Commander a little too well. "Iâ€| what are you getting at? Are saying that the King is controlling Astrid."

"In a way," he shook his head. "Consider this, the King tampered with her mind. What if aside from the possibility of creating his own agent, his own spy, he decided to also influence her perceptions of those around herâ€|"

I gulped, a new fear growing within my stomach. What if my grandfather was right and that the whole reason Astrid was with me at all was because she wasâ€| influenced into doing so? What if the real Astrid really saw me the same way as she did way back when this mess

all started, as just a load to be pitied? Or worse, like any one of my enemies who wanted me dead or off the throne. "Whyâ€¦ why would the King do such a thing?" Except, I've seen him do far worse.

He shrugged. "I have no clue what he was trying to accomplish with her; there's obvious tactical advantagesâ€¦ yet he sits on this asset and does nothing for no inexplicable reason. Just stay on your guardâ€¦ Regardless of that though..." He then turned around and headed straight towards the darkened cave that seemingly opened onto the cliff face ahead.

"Granddad?" I question, moving to catch up.

He swung his tail in a warding gesture. "Stay back!" he declared. "Do not attempt to follow me."

"But where are you going? Why are you going now?" I just got my grandfather back from after ten years thinking he was dead and now he decided to leave me. I mean, sure he'sâ€¦ different from how I remembered him, but he was still Old Wrinkly to me, if a little grouchier.

"My time is up, I must leave." The stepped into the cave and then turned back towards me. "Do not attempt to follow me, grandchild."

"Butâ€¦ when will you come back?"

He didn't answer that. "You have sixty seven hours, thirteen minutes, and twenty two seconds. Use them wisely."

Just as I was about to cross the threshold into the mouth of the cave, rocks shifted and formed a seamless wall, as if the cave just was not there at all. I scraped against it with my claws, but all I could do was scratch my nails against stone.

"Hey! Quiet down will ya?" I stopped and turned towards Skullcrusher. The Rumblehorn rolled out of his sleeping spot and let out a yawn before turning towards me. "Some of us are trying to sleepâ€¦"

"You slept through all of that shouting and talking early onâ€¦ and you complain about me scratching rock?"

"Well, it's grating on the ears!" he complained. "Kid, some of us got things to do aside from this businessâ€¦"

"Some of us are in a life or death situation from this businessâ€¦" I countered.

"And some of us know the dangers of flying without adequate sleepâ€¦" the Rumblehorn rolled onto his stomach and propped himself up. "... I take it the old geezer woke you?"

"Yeahâ€¦" I then turned towards the small stump of a log that my grandfather gave Skullcrusher. It was burned out now, most of the middle turned into ash, no longer needed. I should have been ecstatic having spoken to him, but now I just felt like I would sink beneath the earth from all the weight put on my shoulders. "Skull, how, how did you get involved in this?"

He shrugged, as if impassive. "Same reason, I got kicked out of being a Knight; I failed my mission. Needless to say, the King knows that I sympathize too much with you guys, Herd, you know."

I squinted my eyes. So, maybe the King selected Skullcrusher as my opponent in the challenge a while back; he was something of a "sympathizer" whatever he meant by that. "That would explain a lot actually."

He smiled. "Kid, I know that you're involved in a lot of trouble right now, but take it from me, you either deal with it now, head on, or you get run over by it."

I returned him a skeptical look. "Somehow, I really think Dad would have like you."

He snorted a laugh. "Maybe, but ain't no way I'm getting anywhere near him when he could set nearby grass on fire just by standing on it."

I frowned. Thanks for reminding me. Not only did I have the King to worry about, but I also had to overcome Mom and Dad somehow.

Skullcrusher's laugh sounded more nervous, probably knowing what was going on in my head. "Kid, you can take this, otherwise the old geezer would never bother coming all this way back. And besides, I know meeting him upsets you, but deep down, he's still your pappy. He's just grumpy."

That was probably the best news I heard all day after the slew of bad news, further challenges, and possible dangers I had to face. Maybe he was right, maybe Old Wrinkly was still the same as always, just more agitated than usual. "Yeah, maybe you're right."

"You know I am," he bragged. He expanded his large wings and carried himself upward with a great just. Powerful wings took a dragon much larger and more aerodynamically unstable skyward. "Either way, I'll catch you later, kid. I think I'll drop by once everything's said and done in the next three days."

I nodded. Time was running out. With the message, the information received, there was nothing else other than to prepare to face the King. He wasn't needed any more either. "I'll see you when I win." Or he'll see me being buried.

Skullcrusher flashed me a big grin. "Ata boy. You better get some rest though, or else you might get blind sided." And then, he took off.

I just sat there in the dark sinkhole, alone. With everyone else gone, my only company was the glowing moonlight that bathed the area, the burned out husk of a log, and a chunk of metal I had no idea what to do with, I decided since I had nothing better to do, I decided on wanting to figure out my next step.

Once Toothless finally gets home, I was going to need to interrogate him about it. Hopefully he remembers enough of this prophecy. I know I was also going to need to dig through all the things we collected in order to figure out what was the other shard he was referring to. I had a vague hunch on what it could be though and I doubted I knew

how it would help.

Also, something occurred to me. My grandfather never said it, but when I look back at the visions I saw, I noticed something odd. My ancestor, Hiccup the First, upon seeing the devastation the King could reek decided he wanted to stop him because of the danger he posed. Well, here's the thing. The King was imprisoned somehow did that mean my ancestor somehow gained the power to do that?

"Hiccup!" I heard a voice calling out in the distance.

I raised my head, letting my ears try to figure out who it was. I wasn't expecting anyone else to come look for me so soon. Usually, I had to wait a little longer, maybe two days for that to happen.

"Hiccup!" the voice echoed again, the sounded resonating from far off away, but I knew who it was now

"Astrid?" I called back.

"Hiccup?" her tone sounded a little more surprised. "Are you down there?"

"In the pit the river feeds into!" I yelled back.

I didn't get an immediate response, but I didn't need it. Shortly after I made my location known, Astrid the Nadder came down in front of me, her expression a little more furious than I expected it to be. "Was this where you kept running off to?" she declared, her voice sounding uh, not satisfied.

"Sort of" I offered an uneasy smile.

She groaned. "Hiccup, you were supposed to help me integrating my Flight and the new Kin!"

"I got distracted." By Rumblehorn working for my long lost grandfather, no less. "And chased out of- Ow!"

She trampled her much larger feet onto my front paws. "That's for disappearing without telling me."

"I deserve that!" Ow. No lasting damage, but man, do my forward paws hurt.

"And this was for everything else"

I closed my eyes, fearing another attack, but instead I found slobber gathering all over the left side of my face. Astrid licked me. "You know, maybe I should take another lashing instead of a licking" I raised my paws to brush a good blob from my eyes. But even though I admit that it was a little gross, I couldn't help but feel a little warm on the inside.

She shown me a grin. Her gesture was clearly one of affection; if we weren't dragons, I was sure it would have been a kiss. "Come on, we should head back. It's getting late."

I just stood there, still feeling the buzz of that one moment. I

really hoped that my grandfather's theory was wrong; because even though Astrid's affections for me might not have beenâ€¦ real, my affections for her were.

Instead of advancing forward or taking off, I took another option. I laid down.

Astrid squinted an eye. "Hiccup?"

"Astrid, why don't you and Iâ€¦ stay here for a while?" I offered, coiling into a semicircle, clearing a space large enough for the dragoness to lay her body down in.

She looked at me uneasily. She looked at me and then at the direction of the village, as if she could see it from all the village all the way over here. "You know, my father still doesn'tâ€¦ totally accept thisâ€¦ relationship of ours you know."

I smiled. "He doesn't have to."

Astrid turned back to me and moved closer, her expression one of thought. "Hm, he doesn't have to..." she repeated, her tone one ofâ€¦ wondering.

But I think the answer was rather obvious. We'd both rather just spend some time with each other, in dreamless slumber.

59. Chapter 59

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If there had ever been a day I would ever be glad to see a Whispering Death at all, now was probably the first.

The old man broke off his bombardment and attempted to blast the Whispering Death out with a quick jolt. His aim was off though, and the dragon sped towards him with a frenzying speed, teeth open.

With him no longer attacking me, I was able to break through and carve a path towards that wretched old fool.

In panic the old man tapped his staff onto the ground and set a surge of sparks in every which direction. The Whispering Death veered off course as the shockwaves blasted him away. I however had the best sword ever and practically _cleaved_ my way through Mildew's wall of energy.

I swung my sword and nearly took off his head if it wasn't for a lucky block!

"Stupid brat!" he spat, his staff sparking "Let go!"

"How about, no?" I then did something foolish and grabbed onto the old man's staff andâ€¦ then I felt like I was being pulled into some sort of whirlpool before finding myself looking at a sky ofâ€¦ wooden planks. Somehow, I think we ended up in the hold.

"Give me that back!" hissed Mildew, knocking his staff into my face

in my moment of confusion. He then dashed out of the room with surprising speed for an old freak.

I rubbed my face, feeling a stinging blister as though my cheek was itself singe by real lightning. But I did not have time to waste; I then began my chase. "Get back here!"

The old man spun around, raising his staff in a wide arc, his staff glowing with an intense burst much like the one he pulled for that big attack. "Not on your-"

And then from out beneath the floorboards came another spinning maw, whilst another was burrowing its way through the top. Okay, so both whispering Deaths were here; now I felt confident. I raised my sword. "You were saying?"

The old man cursed something and then blasted the nearest wall, causing the old ship to rumble as wood was practically blown open.

I raised my hands to guard myself against the floating debris and then made the nearest attempt to rush against the old man.

He flung lightning against and again, attempting to blast me, but it did him no good. I was cutting through his attacks, my sword elevating me to a level I wish I had for real. Now I got why father cared so much for it.

However, unfortunately for the old man, I wasn't the only one after him this time. Both of the Whispering Deaths, acting as if with a single mind converged after us, blasting the old man with sharp fire and poisonous spines, however, it seemed for a moment that most of those were practicallyâ€| curving away from hitting the old man via some unusual power- maybe it was that helmet of his granting him some protection. It seemed like we would never land a hit on him

However, I don't think that protection covered my sword.

I took a dare and risked one final attack. If this kept going on, I don't know if I had enough in me to keep going, but I was sure that Mildew's helmet was giving him the strength to keep running where any normal man his age should have failed. I put as much as I could muster into one final lunge, sprinting as far and as fast as I could go, letting my blood pump to my heart at its fullest.

Mildew kept blasting me and the Whispering Deaths, but he didn't appear to notice me gaining until it seemed too late. He flung as much power as he could all in one shot, one glob of lightning so big it could practically engulf me.

I swung my sword and raised it to deflect it, but my blade was hurled out of my grasp the moment it made contact and dispersed it. I didn't dare stop and pick it up.

I ran towards Mildew and leapt on top of him, grabbing his sparking staff andâ€|

We found ourselves back on the ship, lying on the floor in a heap, but I didn't focus on that too much. Mildew struggled to regain control of his staff against me, boasting more physical strength than I really doubted came from the old man himself. I held on, the

lightning practically coursing through my veins at this point.

"Let go, you runt!" he snarled. A shock rippled through my entire body, but I held on. "You can't hold against me!"

I gritted my teeth. "I'm strong enough." I was a runt, sure, compared to every other Viking. But Mildew was not like the others; he had to be within my weight class, I was sure of it. I pushed back, rising to my feet to give myself more leverage.

"Bah, you're no one!" he snapped. The old man brought his staff lower, my strength buckling against the force he brought. My back was up against the wall, lifting me up as his unreal strength pushed against me. "You're less than a boy, less than even a dragon!"

I struggled to keep that stick of his from reaching my neck, deadly seeming lightning dancing all over it as if it was the conduit for a thunderous sky. It seemed impossible that the lightning from the staff was not burning me, but I was sure that if I let go, I'd be in for a world of trouble. I took a chance and swung a kick against the old man's chest, knocking him back enough to give myself some breathing room and put my boots on the ground. "What nonsense are you talking about?"

"The fact that I find you despicable!" Mildew wasn't down and out yet. He still had enough fight in him, way more than I did; stupid unfair magic helmet. "Boy, dragon. You pretend to be one or the other, but you're neither!" As soon as he said that, I felt a quick surge run up my arms, the pain distracting me enough to lose my grip. I let go of the staff and with the opening provided to him, the old man struck me with the staff.

I fell back onto the ground, my back aching. I turned my attention back to the old man, but instead I found myself looking directly at the very bottom of his staff, small arcs of lightning threatening to wipe away my chin. I raised my gaze at the old man, giving him a defiant look. "And why does any of that matter?" I spat, actually spitting in his direction. "What's so wrong about me?" I was not going to be a coward here, not when my friends' lives were threatened by him.

"I'll tell you what's so wrong!" His expression seemed to only grow more angered at me, which sad to say was the intended result. He smacked his staff against my skull and pushed my head towards the ground, the staff letting out tingling sparks as it did. "Your kind, youâ€¦ who dared to disguise yourselves in different forms, you're either threatsâ€¦ or traitors," he said that last word in a bitter tone. "You masquerade amongst us, hiding among us like wolves among sheep, sometimes even literally. You then exploit us, deceive us, take advantage of young menâ€¦"

That last part sounded a littleâ€¦ close, like a personal reason, but I didn't want to interrupt him yet. I took a glance at the rest of my surroundings, hoping the old man would keep rambling so as not to catch where my gaze went.

"You are disloyal, untrustworthy!" he said. "How could you be when we can't even expect you to stick to a single shape? Your loyalties might well be easily dissolved from the moment you accepted a second nature!"

That I know wasn't true about me! "I stayed faithful up until the one I put my trust into, the one that I served practically ripped my family apart in half!" I barked. It was the King that was the first to betray me, not I. I was effectively banished due to incidents that happened because of a family dispute that went out of control; he was the one that took my parents hostage!

Mildew hissed. "That's just proof that you're doubly untrustworthy; you're a dragon, a Night Fury at that, the lowest of the low in my book!" He sent a painful jolt against my chest; I didn't know how life threatening it was, I just knew it hurt. "Your particular kind are a real threat, working with the enemies of your kinsmen for what? Power?"

"It wasn't like thatâ€¦" I breathed. Technically he was kind of right, but at the time, I didn't know my family beyond my mother. Of course, Mom had her own reasons that I doubt any of us are able to justify with anything other than sheer desperation. Desperation was all I had left really.

I swung my leg in an arc and knocked the old man in the knees. He howled in pain and nearly collapsed to the ground. I brought myself back up as fast as I could with a much speed as I could muster and tackled the old man to the ground.

Mildew struggled against me, but I had him pinned. I might not have had a tail right now, but I knew enough about grappling my opponent to keep him down. Empowered or not, the old man should really just be an old man. "Get off!" he barked, struggling to move that enchanted staff of his; unfortunately, he only had a single hand and I put a good chunk of my weight into holding it.

"Not til you- Argh!" Correction, I didn't have the old man pinned. The old man slugged me with his other fist and shoved me off with force that definitely should not belong to men his age.

We both rose to our feet once again, vying for control of the staff, but I was nearing my rope's end. Mildew was not. I was quickly loosing footing even faster than before and before, I was losing to begin with. Mildew, should have been affected by fatigue or injury, but he just kept shrugging it off as if he was made of springs.

"Let me tell you something, before you die, boyâ€¦" he pushed me back against the wall once again, lifting me off my feet as he did.

"When I was a young man, I fell in love with this woman. I wed her, thinking she was going to be mine; forever to keepâ€¦"

I thought back to the first time I met the old man, then I thought him just a simple senile drunkard, ranting off about something. He compared me to his wife of all things. Now, his words then somehow felt like they explained what happened now.

"One day, I learned she was with child; it should have been the happiest day of my life. But do you know how she repaid me?"

I didn't answer, too busy trying to keep myself from being shocked to death by the deadly electricity that ran up and down the staff. I could practically feel my hairs stand on end as well as the death

that was promised if I didn't keep my guard up.

"She ran away, taking our unborn child with her!" he snarled. His strength seemed to double and the electrified piece of wood in his hands was nearing close to my neck.

An image flashed between my eyes, the letter that I saw in Mildew's basement, about someone who couldn't stayâ€|with a reply of denial. That was the story connected to the later.

"Sheâ€| ran away to the sea, dawning a seal skin and hiding amongst them. I spent a good chunk of my life hunting her down for betraying me, for taking what was mine. I killed her for it and kept a reminder of her treachery." Mildew's words seemed to sap my resolve, breaking something inside of me. I realized thenâ€| he and I were not so different and that scared me.

I felt my grip on the staff loosen, unsure andâ€| undeserving.

Mildew's body seemed to relax a bit, as if he knew his victory was inevitable. "You die now." And then he went to push his staff against my feeble defense and-

I suddenly found myself falling to the ground, landing my rear with a thud. Mildew was flung sideways, dropping his staff in the process. He struggled to pick himself up again, but a second attack flung him further, this time knocking off his helmet. He would have gone on and picked it upâ€| if the gargantuan foot of a Nadder did not keep the thing pinned underneath her foot.

"Get away!" Stormfly snarled.

I rose to my feet, blinking a few times, wondering what kind of luck must have happened for me to survive. Stormfly wasâ€| alive.

Mildew turned his attention towards his staff and was about to promptly run up towards it, if it wasn't for a certain Bog Burglar rushing in to snatch it away from his grasp. "Looking for something?" she taunted.

Mildew's face turned pale and quickly turned towards the entrance, but that option soon disappeared as two dragons, husband and wife stood in front of him. "I remember you, always a pain." '

Whatever confidence the old man held when facing all of us with his equipment seemed to vanish right off his face, it was clearly obvious he doubted his chances without them now. In fact, I could even see that motions seemed to slow, his â€| energy seemed to fade. Injuries that he should have taken were starting to take effect. Without that helmet, he was practically an average, old man once again.

I laughed, painful because of the dull aches that covered my body. Mildew was out numbered and deprived of every advantage. He turned and tried to make his way to me, perhaps pulling some sort of desperation move, but that went badly for him. I was terrible at fighting up close as a human, but Mildew was far worse; he went down with a quick sucker punch and landed on the ground. "That was for Hiccup!"

Mildew groaned and collapsed onto the ground.

I turned to rest of the group, flashing them a relieved smile. I was glad that Stormfly and Camicazi were alright. In fact, even the sight of the Whispering Deaths was a relief for me; the back up they provided saved me once or twice. "Uhâ€¦ thanks."

The elder male Whispering Death gave me an unreadable expression, maw open wide and facing towards his mate. I didn't know what they were saying, I felt the world was spinning.

Stormfly and Camicazi both showed their own grins. We all came out alright. Camicazi in particular eyes the old man's staff rather greedily.

"Ughâ€¦. kill me now," we all turned towards Mildew, trying to stand up despite his injuries.

"Stormfly kicked the helmet towards to Camicazi, who picked it up. "We should finish him, here and now; that's what we came for, didn't we?"

I knew I was probably going to regret this some day. I shook my head. "Let's justâ€¦ leave him hereâ€¦"

"Excuse me?" said Stormfly.

"You heard me." I hobbled forward. I felt tired, weary from all of that. "We're leaving him, where he can't do us any harm."

Camicazi shown me a look. "Uhâ€¦ WHY?"

Stormfly had almost the same expression and almost breathed the same sentence

The male Whispering Death interjected. "I don't know why anyone would spareâ€¦ this one, but if the Night Fury has a good reason for wanting to; he probably has one."

I nodded. Because after listening to the old man's spiel, I most certainly did not want to become anything like him; bitter and full of revenge. His story was similar enough to my own that, honestly, I wondered if sometime in the next sixty years, I might actually be like him. His wife stole his child, the King stole my parents; we were both in a sense betrayed, though I wonder if the differences vast enough to keep me away from his fate. I got enough pay back for knocking him senseless and taking from him his staff and helmet; he's practically harmless now.

Mildew practically growled. "What's wrong, too soft?"

I shook my head. "No, you just don't matterâ€¦ Now get out of my sight!"

Everyone nodded their heads, though the mother Whispering Death needed to be told what I was saying. The two dragons that barred the only escape stepped away.

The old man rose to his feet, clutching his sides and his legs. His expression was full of fury and murder. "Mark my words, I'll be

back," he promised.

"I don't care," I said.

Camicazi brandished her new staff and pointed it at the base of his spine. "Move it or lose it!" she commanded, her tone sounding with glee.

Mildew was forced to comply, stepping out of the way with a slow, uneasy hobble and a trickle of blood running down his legs.

"Are you sure that was the right idea?" Stormfly asked, once he was gone.

I sighed, feeling the energy of battle leaving me. I felt so light headed, and I think my hair might have smelled like a burnt piece of hamm. Turning to her, I nodded and stepped forward, but my foot never reached the ground. I felt myself falling, my gaze turning towards the roof, my eyes heavy.

I awoke to find myself looking into familiar looking eyes. Dimly, I recalled her name, yet it failed to escape my lips. The red hair was a tip off, but everything looked blurry and indistinct. A word, no a name, tried to escape my lips, but was kept bound by a inkling of uncertainty.

"Toothless," a voice called to me.

I felt like lazily raising my hand and pointing to my chest, wondering if that was meant for me? Was I toothless? I think I was about to raise my hand over to check it.

"Toothless," the voice called to me. I saw the face in front of my view was the source of the voice.

"Stormfly?"

"Wake up," She commanded. I wiped away the blurriness from my eyes and came face to face with to the currently human red head. She must have changed back right after that fight. She was dressed in her usual clothes hand-me-downs from Astrid combined with her own personal flairs with the addition of several bandages in key spots. They most likely covered areas where she took damage.

"How- how long was I out?" I rasped.

"Several hours," she replied. "Are you feeling okay?"

"No." My throat felt sore, my head was still wobbly, and I was sure I was feeling an injury somewhere on my abdomen. I think my face hurt the most, right at the spot where Mildew knocked me away with a blast of lightning; all of me hurt, but that was where I took a direct hit. I moved hand over to my left cheek to get a feel over how bad it was.

She slapped my hand. "Don't touch it!" she commanded. "If you do, that burn mark might just stick!"

I gave her a sheepish smile. "Uh, okay..." I dropped my hand

She nodded. "You got to take better care about your personal appearance you know. Get beat up too bad or fail to keep your injuries mended properly and you'll mess up that face of yoursâ€|"

"Uh, I thought scars were a good thing; I mean, isn't that one of those thing both humans and dragons look to in warriors? " Stormfly had never been ever concerned about myâ€| appearance before. This was weird. Like, what happened? Why was she obsessing about whether or not my injuries would leave a lasting mark?

She snorted, as if the idea seemed silly. "Oh, sure, one or two, but only if they're subtle and out of the way of anything important. Get them on your face and in the wrong spot and it'll look real bad. And even then, it only really works if you have the lifestyle for it; which I don't think you do."

"... Right," I said. I really doubted I could argue against a born Nadder about what things were right or wrong to do in terms of fashion sense. That'd be like trying to tell a fish to swim better. So, I was left trying to wonder how bad the injury looked until I went back home and found a mirror.

Before I could ask anything else, I heard the sound of pottery breaking.

Turning to the noise, I saw two familiar looking Whispering Deaths playing with clay pots. Meanwhile, their father, Donnar the Whispering Death was trying to shoo them away from the pots. Like all rambunctious tykes their age, they didn't always listen. The mother, nearby seemed to find the whole scene rather charming, humming to herself an amused tune.

I raised an eyebrow. When did the Whispering Deaths get pottery? In fact, why were they all here? And why did the parents aid me some hours ago?

I had a dozens of questions going through my head, but the first one that came up left my lips. "Where are we?"

Camicazi seeming to summersault out from nowhere and land right on top of me. She had this look in her eyes that said she was enjoying herself. "Well, we're obviously behind that old hunk of metal tha' that old jerk was trying to get into!" She pointed towards a pair of heavy iron doors that had fallen inwards. "You did a real number on 'em. you know!"

I blinked, remembering how easily they fell from my touch alone. I turned around me, recalling that the last time I had been inside this cave, everything was pitch black and indistinct in the shadows. Now, the entire room was illuminated by a collection of torches scattered around the place, making the whole room glow slightly orange, but seeable.

The room, this cavern was honestly not the sort of thing I would ever expect way out in the middle of nowhere. There was what looked to be a dining table off in the middle of the room, behind that was a weapons rack that was empty save a few ruined and rusted spears. Of to another side, was a small bookcase, lined with books that even this far away looked like they would fall apart as easily as the

metal door. Clay pots covered another side whilst another was draped in faded old tapestry that had been eaten away by time. Oh, and quite a bit of that was broken and on the ground, mostly due to my fault, the young whelpings were just adding more ontop of that. "What is this place?" I gasped, standing onto my feet.

Camicazi and Stormfly shrugged. "Notta clue!" said the Bog Burglar. "But I'm thinkin' whoever owned all this stuff is long gone, so whatever we like, we can take; not the same as takin' from someone's who's still around, but hey, free stuff!" She then flashed Stormfly a look.

The not-currently-Nadder gave Camicazi a nervous glance, prompting the Bog Burglar to elbow her for a reason I couldn't understand. "Uh," Stormfly cringed and then pulled something right from nearby "We also managed to take back all of Mildew's things," she said pulling Mildew's lightning spouting staff from and that odd helmet he wore.

Camicazi rolled her eyes for some reason.

I picked up the helmer, thinking it was the more important of the two. "I wonder what's so special about this thingâ€¦" It gave Mildew a tremendous boost to his powers, that much I was sure of and I was sure I heard it talking to him. Lights did not shine in the places where eyes would be and I felt a sense that whatever was inside of that piece of headwear was drained.

"It certainly made Mildew powerful," supplied Stormfly.

And I was unsure if I wanted it. I had no idea about what was this thing in my hands was capable of or where it came from. Maybe in the future I could interrogate it, but as for right now, it seemed useless to me. I put the helmet away and attempted to examine the staff. Like the helmet, the staff also feltâ€¦ drained, like I couldn't get it to make another spark even if I tried. "You know, is there a reason why every time I grabbed hold of this thing during the fight, I ended up in the same exact spot? I mean, it shoots lightning and does all sorts of spells, but why did I always end up in a moldy old ship's hold?"

Both of the girls just shrugged. "It'd be handy in a getaway," said Camicazi. "Always a good idea to have a fast ride, but I don't know if you could control it."

I nodded. I doubted I could understand the staff enough to use it properly, even if I knew how to reactivate it, that was for sure. But no, this thing was pretty much iconic of Mildew himself; I didn't want anything to do with it. I handed it back to Camicazi. "Why don't you take care of this?"

"Well, I can't shoot lightning!" she proclaimed.

I shrugged. "Keep it anyways, maybe it can make a good door stop."

Camicazi's face contorted into a look of contemplation, as if wanting to accept. "Okayâ€¦" she said and then turned to Stormfly, yet again. "Anything you'd like to add?"

Stormfly's face turned slightly pink and she went off to the pile of bags in our new shelter, the pile of our things.

I eyed Camicazi, who simply shrugged. I wondered what that was all about. What was Camicazi trying to push her to do.

Moment's latter Stormfly came back with what looked to be a rather melted looking piece of metal, fashioning an uncomfortable grimace.

Camicazi practically slapped herself in the face, though I wasn't sure exactly why.

Although, I think I had an idea as to why. I took the wrecked remains of my sword and cradled it in my arms. After just a single battle, the blade was hideously bent out of shape and melted in key areas. When it got knocked out of my hands when Mildew struck me with that last bolt of lightning, it must have been enough to damage the sword. I knew I could probably repair the metal, but was I ever going to be able to fix the enchantments that made it block lightning or give me the skill to compete? I didn't have a copy of them to work with. Suddenly, I was missing my first taste of proficient swordplay as much as I missed flying. "I...think I can fix it," I lied.

Camicazi took the damaged blade from me. "Well, you do that later, right now, aren't you gonna talk with the family of four that you made friends with?"

I blinked and turned towards the dragons out in the corner. I almost forgot about them. "Uh, I can only talk to one of them!" And I was still not really sure what to make out of him. I mean, he saved me _once._ It's not like he became my uncle or something.

Camicazi handed me my black cloak. "Well, put this on then!" she said, urging me to do something.

I turned to Stormfly, who was giving me a nervous look. "Uh, what's going on?"

"Nothing!" declared Stormfly, face turning a little redder than normal.

I squinted my eyes and turned back to my cloak. "I don't know, can I turn back into a dragon? I mean, it wasn't working all day."

"Put it on," said Camicazi. "Go and meet them."

I shrugged. Clearly Camicazi wanted me gone for some reason, probably girl things, of that I had no doubt. "Fine, fine." I dressed myself and stepped away.

Besides, if they wanted me away for a while, I might as well check to see if all of my things were in order. I put on my hood and felt my body twist and change, the transfiguration more pained than it should have been, but it worked.

The Whispering Death's all turned to me, turning their blind eyes and senses over to my direction, sniffing in my direction. "Scaleless?" said the mother.

"No," I replied. "I am Toothless, a Night Fury. Well, sort of."

She seemed rather surprised. "Oh," she said, closing in to examine me. Her spinning teeth unnerved me. "You changed. That wasâ€¦ unexpected. The Nadder changed back and forth, are you able to do that too?"

I nodded, before realizing they couldn't see me that well with their milky white eyes. "Yes. I'mâ€¦ just getting used to it though."

"Sounds fascinating," replied the female. She then turned to her children. "Isn't that right boys?"

Both hatchlings gurgled pleased cries. Both were now smaller than me by a fair margin, but I knew that sooner or later, they'd outmass me easily.

She then turned to her husband. "Say, maybe this one can cure you of your affliction?"

"Not the time, Dear, not the time." The father's face contorted into a frown, well, what passed for a for a creature with a massive smile jaws, clearly upset by the revelation. I can only imagine why. I knew he didn't take too kindly to being made into a Whispering Death and had practically wanted to kill himself to actually reconnect with being a Viking, causing all sorts of havoc on the way. Now I got his family interested in it and only Odin knew how well I'd end up from all of that.

"It was just a thought," uttered the female. "I'm certain our children deserve to know about your Scaleless heritageâ€¦"

The male wheezed something. "I can't go back; we've been through this!"

"But clearly, this Night Fury is able to change form at will, why can't you?"

"One really strong curse," I supplied and immediately regretted that decision.

Both of the Whispering Deaths turned to me, flashing their spinning teeth. Oh, just my luck to get involved with some sort of domestic dispute between my least favorite species of dragon.

I threw up both front paws. "I don't fully know why it's so hard toâ€¦ cure some false Kin, the changed that is. The means Stormfly and I change are different and work at our whims, but they won't work on you, as far as we know."

The male Whispering Death let out a bellow. "See? He can't help us!"

"Butâ€¦ you don't need to change back to go home," I finished.

Both adult Whispering Deaths eyed me, looking at me with confusion. "What? You mean live amongst the Scaleless?"

I nodded, again forgetting they were blind. "Yes." I raised up a paw.

"There's plenty of others who share a similar fate these days, and as well as other Kin," though admittedly that latter group did not have much choice in the matter. "Honestly, you might not be noticed at all, there's plenty of others."

Donnar the Whispering Death's jaw hung open; okay, maybe that's a little wrong since Whispering Deaths often had their jaws open, but I think going at that angle was not normal. After a minute he finally managed to pick it up. "Is this real?" he said in disbelief. "Why would you invite us, invite me?"

"It's how I want to thank you both, for saving my skin" I replied. I don't know what reason the Whispering Deaths had to save me. I would have asked, but the conservation didn't move in that direction. Clearly, the male, Donner, had his own reasons for doing so. Whatever they were, I was alive because of that.

"This is a bold decision to make" said the female. "So much to consider. Would such an environment be good for our children?"

"Take your time," I replied and then turned to the male. "You still know the way back?"

He nodded. "Just stay out of trouble. Every time we meet, trouble follows in your wake."

I let out a chuckle. "Alright, I'll leave you on your own then." I then turned and left the four, letting husband and wife decide amongst themselves whether they would accept my offer or not.

I took off my hood, its purpose fulfilled. Taking it off, I folded it nicely and held it close to my chest. I was glad that at least this thing was working again. Admittedly, I've grown to identify myself as being more human than dragon over the past few months, but I really did not want to just throw that part of my life away. It was kind of my birth rite

"Toothless?" I heard Stormfly's voice calling to me again.

I turned. "Stormfly? Uh what's going on?" Behind me, I saw Stormfly advancing forward, Camicazi behind her, pushing her forward.

Camicazi chirped. "Alright, you go and say to it, him, just like we said."

Stormfly nodded to the girl looking somewhat nervous. "Okay"

"Uh, is something the matter?" I squinted. It seemed like there was an important matter worth doing

Stormfly stepped forward and sighed. "Well, I've been thinking."

"Thinking?" Okay, so what was so wrong about thinking?

Stormfly turned to Camicazi again, who gestured in an indescribable manner. "It's just, after today, being captured, being separated..."

I nodded. "We've been through plenty today. Near death experiences."

"And soon we will have to face our former Lord," she continued.

I nodded again. With Mildew out of the way, I guess brother and I will do something to prepare ourselves to face the Red Death. Maybe something more covert, rather than a full scale military engagement. "Okay, so, what about it?"

Camicazi whispered something in Stormfly's ear.

The red head spoke. "I wanted to know, have you thought about what might come after that?"

I blinked. "Uh, no." I said, honest. I mean, what would I do after the Red Death died, assuming I lived? I mean, maybe that'll take the rest of my life to accomplish, unless the stars align or someone really big and powerful decided to help us. "You have a suggestion?"

She nodded. "Sort of." She then turned towards the family of Whispering Deaths still discussing about whether or not they would come back with us or not. "I was wondering, if you'd want to spend more time with me?"

"Uh, okay." I didn't see anything wrong with that, yet I had an inkling feeling that there was something I was not quite getting.

This time, both of the girls slapped their heads.

"You know Toothless, you ain't as bright as your brother sometimes." chirped Camicazi.

"Gee, thanks." I rolled my eyes.

60. Chapter 60

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Well, in retrospect, I could have handled Mildew better. But sadly, there wasn't enough time on my allotment to actually develop him. I did hint pieces of it before though.****

"Don't you think you may be taking this a _wee bit _far?" asked my teacher. He swapped out his replaceable hand for its hammer attachment and began to pound at the metal within his tongs.

I glowered, by now my teach should know perfectly well when I was being pressed for time. I tapped a nearby wooden board and runes appeared onto. 'IMPORTANT ENOUGH,' it said. 'DEADLINE.'

Gobber shrugged and went back to work pounding the metal. "Well, I can't say I've ever had any request like this. I mean, it's weird enough what you're asking me to do, but this sort of thing normally takes lots of time."

I nodded. This sort of thing normally took a week to do and normally wasn't applied to a dragon. I guess the only thing to do then would be to cut corners. I mean, we don't exactly have enough time to make all of the metal wire and I couldn't help him as I was now. 'USE METAL PLATES,' I told him. That should have reduced the amount of work by a good margin.

I was running out of time. If my grandfather's prediction was going to come true, I needed to be ready to face the King one last time. The day after tomorrow, the King was going to be free and break my entire home and there was nothing I could do about it; I had to challenge him before then. And that was going to require I also challenge both my mother and father and that was going to require I did something to counter the gifts they had been given. And that was all dependant on Gobber hammering the parts I couldn't do on my own.

I turned towards the furnace and blasted the inside with a jet of fire, trying to keep the temperature as high as I could. I needed the metal ore smelted into a useable form as fast as I could; I didn't want anything else, I didn't need anything.

"Hiccup!" I heard a voice call from outside, in Dragonese.

Gobber gave me an inquisiting look and went to greet the newcomer. "Oh? Astrid. Good to see you uh, what's that you got there girl?"

I raised my head out of the furnace and saw my girlfriend hauling in what appeared to be a sheep carcass in side. Astrid seemed more relaxed since last night. Her tail swished back and forth in an almost playful, carefree manner, her mouth was open in an expectant way, like something in a sense changed about her. I don't really know. "Brought you lunch!" she pushed the hunk of sheep with her paw.

I looked at it. The shep was obviously quite dead and "Did you cook it?"

"Uh, I'll leave you two alone" Gobber had to dodge the Nadder's swinging tail like he was trying to win at limbo; for a guy as big as my mentor, Gobber was surprisingly agile. He ducked under and went back to work.

Astrid gave an awkward smile, apparently not having noticed nearly jabbing some spikes near my teacher's neck. "Had to get it from someone else since all the sheep had already been eaten or chased out! Hope you like it!"

I hesitated. Uh, Astrid wasn't exactly skilled in the "womanly" activities such as food preparation or housekeeping and well, her offering did seem a little blackish.

Astrid pushed the cooked carcass yet again.

I hobbled over to it and bowed my head down, giving it a sniff. It smelled awful, like, Astrid might have done a little more than overcook it.

Astrid looked at me, her expression that of expectant waiting. Unlike Gobber, it was kind of mandatory I take her offering.

I decided it might be a good idea to score a bit more favor with her; given that she was kind of upset with me earlier last night. She forgave me enough to spend the night with me, but I did need to make up for other things. I took a bite out of the sheep and tore some flesh from a spot that appeared well off, chewing the hunk of meat between my sharp teeth; they weren't all suited for that but I still had my table manners. Although I really wish I didn't.

Astrid looked at me expectantly as I tried to process the chunk. After I swallowed she posed me a question; "Well?"

I gave a sheepish reply. "That wasâ€¦ good." I half-lied. I felt like I had just swallowed a rock, yet funny thing was, Astrid's cooking as a dragon tasted a whole lot better than what she normally made. Of course, that might have to do with my tastebuds being wired differently as a Night Fury, but still...

"Great!" Astrid seemed to be quite pleased with herself. She tore a chunk into the sheep herself and hungrily moved it down her throat. She didn't seem to at all mind the taste of her own bad cooking.

I felt like wincing. If we ever lived through this, I should be the one to make the meals.

I took another cautious bite and then turned back to the furnace. The iron within was gathering up into a hunk of metal that once quenched would probably be used for extra protection later on.

"So, whatcha you doing?" the Nadder tilted her head sideways, looking into the blaze.

"I'm not even sure," I admitted. I was working on a means to protect myself, that much I knew. But was this going to be too much of an overcommitment? Was Gobber going to even have the thing finished by the time I needed it? Atleast today, the angry villagers who were after me yesterday were seemingly over itâ€¦ At least enough that they weren't willing to attack Gobber at the same time.

Astrid nodded almost solemnly. "You want to face him, don't you?"

"And my parents," I added. Strangely, I was more worried about my parents than I was about the King. The King, I atleast had some vague idea of what items my grandfather might be referring and possibly knew that if I played my part, I might get saddled up with something to help me counter the fact that I was quite frankly going up against some near godlike being; I mean, that happened all the time in prophecies right? But my parents I had no idea what I needed to do to beat themâ€¦ and that's not factoring on how I was going to get near them in the first place.

Astrid nodded. "You'll have your chance. Just you wait."

I blasted the furnace with another jet of flame, keeping the temperature high. "Once I figure out how to get past every dragon on that island, maybe I will."

"Well, you _don't _have to," Astrid replied musing on the flame.

My ears flattened and I pull off an inquisitive expression.

"What?"

"Just a saying something!" Astrid replied.

I hummed to myself. I wonder if Astrid was hiding something from me. I mean, if she was, maybe she had good reason for it. Of course, I was hiding something her and everyone else, too, so it's not like I could go claim to be squeaky clean. The King hasn't contacted me since Fort Sinister, but I wonder if he's been looking through our connection again. I mean, he did swear not to do so, but I doubted I could trust his promise; what if he's been spying me all this time and knew of my plans, my goals, especially the stuff I've been told by my grandfather?

Astrid took a turn to blast fire into the furnace herself. As a Sharp class, she had a more concentrated flame than me that was better suited to pouring lots of heat into a single place.

"Not bad," I commented.

"Hiccup!" I heard another voice calling from outside, but this time a whole lot more distant than when Astrid called. Again, it wasn't Norse.

I turned towards Astrid.

She spear out her wings to give her take on a shrug. "Not my doing."

I turned towards Gobber.

My teacher shrugged. "I'm thinking maybe you should answer that one, I've got enough on plate already !" He then hammered his hunk of metal into a flat sheet.

"Hiccup!" said the voice again, this time much closer. Actually, it turns out, it was too close. I heard a thudding noise and the ceiling shook as our visitor apparently bumped into the edge of the roof. A green Gronckle fell out from the roof on his belly, dizzy.

"Fishlegs!" Astrid shouted. "What, what're you doing here?"

"Fishlegs?" I blinked. Okay, wow, _that _was Fishlegs? I hardly recognized the guy. I wonder how he changed himself; was Snotlout involved? I really doubt he went through my house and activated that spear we stole.

Fishlegs the Gronckle quickly rolled onto his belly with a plop and faces us his expression almost hollow despite how round his face now was. "Hiccup, Toothless is back!" he declared. "He just arrived this morning!"

I think my jaw nearly dropped to the floor. Toothless was finally back! I was beginning to wonder what took my brother so long when he said he'd only be gone for a day to take care of an errand. I guess

he must have got delayed.

"And Stormfly and the thief?" Astrid asked, substituting Camicazi's name for something else since like many things, it didn't work as well in Draconic tongue.

Fishlegs nodded vigorously. "Yeah, they're here too. I hear they picked up some treasure on the way over!"

I was still recovering and trying to wonder what I was supposed to do in this situation. On the one hand, as an older brother, I was glad my younger sibling was alive after a possibly dangerous voyage. On the other, he did promise me he'd be back a few days sooner. I'll bet it had to do with that so called treasure he acquired.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" exclaimed Astrid. She turned to me, looking impatient.

I looked Gobber who was beginning to turn some of the metal he gathered into a thin wire. If I left Gobber now, would I be safe going out there? I mean, he was a big deterrent against anyone who was still upset at me for causing, at least in their eyes, all of the human-dragon transfigurations.

"I said, 'what are we waiting for?'" Astrid exclaimed a again.

"Uh, right!"

Astrid stepped outside the building, prompting me to follow and causing my instructor to take notice of us leaving.

"Oh, you're leaving already?" said the aged man.

I nodded.

"Well, take care!" he waved his still living hand in the air.

I waved back, lifting my paw in an awkward fashion and stepped outside.

I guess Gobber can handle himself then. I mean, I know he can rig up some impressive stuff in a day, like a mini-catapult or a flamethrower. Maybe he'll be fine creating what I needed him to make. He didn't need me to craft all of the hard bits; I figure I might just be needed to make the finishing touches, an enchantment of some sort.

Once I was outside, Astrid seemed satisfied that I came. "Lead the way," said the Nadder.

Fishlegs nodded, looking apprehensive about it, but he did it anyways.

We all took wing and darted off into the sky following behind the Gronkle of the group.

Fishlegs wobbled and swayed awkwardly as he flew, his tiny and rapidly moving wings providing just enough to lift him off the ground, but it seemed like he had a hard time controlling his stability. Of course, now that I noticed how Fishlegs was doing

despite being perhaps around a day being a dragon, I quickly compared him to Astrid. Astrid had larger, better wings meant for flying. She seemed more adept at it than him, less awkward imbalances; In fact, I was sure she was fairly good at flying, enough to use it reliably in a fight, during that challenge the King gave us during the winter. I had to wonder if that had anything to do with the King messing with herâ€| or because she was Astrid; I'd like to lean on the latter.

"So, how is it that everyone but me 'gets' learning how to fly so fast?" I mused aloud.

"Iâ€| wouldn't say I'm flying," muttered Fishlegs, sounding pretty insecure about his performance right about now.

Astrid gave a laugh and bumped my side. "That's because you're you," she said.

"So, is there some sort of flying discrimination against 'Hiccups'?" I jokingly replied.

"Well, Meatlug says Gronckle flight is easy because the wing muscles rapidly twitch automatically. It's just a matter about tilting the wings the right wa-AAAYY!" yelped Fishlegs. As soon as he gave his attention towards that lesson, he lost control momentarily and ended up performing an in air somersault and crashed against some poor fellow's roof. He didn't stop flying, but his carapace definitely took off some shingles as he went back in the air. "That was scaryâ€|" he commented.

Astrid rolled her eyes. "You know, maybe you should spend less time thinking about flyingâ€| and actually flying my Knight."

I nodded my head. Yeah, that summed up my problem quite well earlier. I spent days just trying to remember how I wanted to position my fins in the right order. Fishlegs probably had the same problem as I did, just not as severe.

"We're here!" exclaimed Fishlegs, promptly ending that topic in exchange of something more relevant.

At an area a block away from my house, a crowd gathered swarming a familiar trio as they strode through Berk. A few of Astrid's dragons, also looked in at the exchange with mild curiosity; after the events of yesterday, several of the more daring young dragons decided to look around the village with more interest. They chatted with several of the former humans to get a read on the situation.

My brother stood in the middle of the group, holding up a staff hand belonging to Mildew and a helmet that was definitely the one I had seen in a dream, the one where my ancestor, Hiccup the first was brought to a trial. Stormfly, in human form stood nearby, holding a small collection of old books, with worn but still valuable looking covers. Camicazi held up a pot, small but decorated with paints.

The mess of Vikings gathered around them, extolling their successes and their findings. Most offered free food and drink to the weary returning adventurers, going so far as to propose a small feast should be in honor for the sole victory in these tumultuous times. A few though went so far as say that my brother should have been the

one in charge of things around here. That last part caught me a little of guard.

I landed just a little off to the side from the group, thinking about it all.

This wasn't the first time someone looked towards Toothless as being the _actual_ Hope and Heir of the Hooligan Tribe.

My younger brother was always a little more popular around the village than I was, largely due to _not_ having a rap sheet the size of the nearest mountain and because no one really thought too hard about where he came from, and to be fair, my brother had been proving himself a valuable member of society since day oneâ€¦ where as I still have yet to completely undo years of accidents and burned houses.

The three of them went off somewhere on a short adventure and brought home treasures, either long lost items from a place no one even remembers or the belongings of an enemy. The place they went to obviously wasn't all that famous, but loot was loot and taking something from an enemy, especially someone as hated as Mildew was serious material. As far as the Vikings were concerned, that was just more proof that my brother was better suited for leading Vikings than I wasâ€¦ even if it was something as useless as books so old that they were falling to pieces; we Vikings kind of had strange taste when it came to treasure.

I tried not to let that bother me. I mean, why would I want to be Hope and Heir of a Tribe of smelly Vikings? I mean, sure, Toothless is still a bit inexperienced about all of the political issues, but I was sure that my Dad could straighten him out once it became time to inherit, but surely he could do a better job.

"It's bothering you, isn't it?" I saw Astrid creep into my view.

"No," I replied, keeping my gaze away from her.

The Nadder's eyes narrowed and moved towards me, keeping herself within gaze. "It does!" she laughed. "You're worried about losing your second name!"

I rolled my eyes. "No, I'm not!" I insisted. Although I had an inkling suspicion that maybe I was talking more to myself at that point.

"Whatever you say," Astrid's eyes rolled in their sockets, which is by the way, very weird to look at on a Nadder because of how their eyes are positioned. "Now, are you going to meet him or what? I know I have to bite on Stormfly's left leg for abandoning meâ€¦" I wondered if that was her being serious or not.

I shook my head. I was going to need to ask my brother about a prophecy he received. I stood in the path of the of the band of celebrants.

Toothless was the first to notice me. He pushed his way out of the crowd, shoving them, or more accurately they moved out his his way themselves. He bounced forward, meeting me in the street just outside

the house. "Hiccup!" he sounded cheery, showing me a smile.

I returned that affection with a little playful jab. "I see you took your time. Did you end up looting the grave of someone important?" Because, as everyone knew, only the really important got tombs.

"No," he said, before frowning and apparently changing his mind. "Well, I don't know! All I know is, Mildew wanted the stuff that was inside, I took it instead as well as some things of his." He rattled his two prizes, Mildew's staff and the helmet he had taken from Fort Sinister.

I eyed the two items curiously, wondering if maybe either of those things could be used to help. Both items seemed like normal household items at the time, aside from their unusual designs and decorations.

Toothless seemed to catch on to that. "I'm still not sure how to use either of them and whatever it is in the helmet doesn't want to come out right now."

"Pity," I commented. And here I was hoping we could interrogate that hunk of bronze to find ourselves some answers. I mean, it certainly had to know more about what was going on than any of us did. At the very least, we should have been able to use that staff and I don't know, mass produce a dozen of those things.

At this point, we both realized that while we were chatting away, the others grouped up together. Fishlegs and Astrid went over to Camicazi and Stormfly. Astrid was verbally berating Stormfly for having left her and Camicazi for encouraging that; the other two didn't seem to mind it and countered with their own quips about how the adventure played out. Apparently, there were swinging axes and traps they had to use skill and cunning to go through.

Astrid though apparently didn't believe them, probably because Fishlegs noted all of the logical impossibilities in their retelling. "I'm pretty sure that you can't burn your way through a cave in without suffocating yourself," he would say.

My brother raised his hands and pointed towards the nearby Gronckle. "... is that who I think it is?"

I nodded. "And Fishlegs is already a Knight, as of yesterday."

I think my brother went cross eyed for a second there. "Wait, really?"

I let out a snicker I bet he really wasn't expecting Fishlegs to be made a Knight or a dragon the day after he left the island. "Meatlug too."

"Okay, that I believe but Fishlegs, really, him?"

I shone him by teeth, but it was at this moment I noticed something worrying.

From behind my brother, the the Vikings were growing rather weary about listening to a conversation that they could conversation that

they could only listen to half of. They were planning earlier to celebrate, but my arrival probably put a damper on their moods, probably because some of them were still upset at me. They clearly didn't seem angry enough to attack me, here and now, but maybe I was beginning to overstay my welcome.

"Hey, uh, guys," I told the other dragons and Toothless and Stormfly, maybe we should carry this conversation somewhere else," I suggested. "Home is nearby."

The others all seemed to agree.

Camicazi simply smiled.

Stormfly muttered something about finally being able to bathe again, while Camicazi teased Astrid about how she could have gone and smashed Mildew's face in.

Toothless shrugged, "Yeah, it'd be nice too go home at last." He turned towards the crowd and waved the Vikings farewell. "I'm going home, see you later.."

We departed from the Vikings, leaving them behind. With their plans of a feast or minor celebrations canceled, they went back to whatever it was they were doing before my brother showed up and thankfully not hovering nearby the Night Fury responsible for all of their troubles, including little Gertrude's cold!

We went over to my house, easily in walking distance, but as Toothless went over to turn the doorknob, the door toppled inward. "Okay, what's it with me and doors lately?" he complained.

I lent him an awkward grin. "Uh, that was me, remember?" I said. Toothless might have forgotten the fact I broke the front door. I did try to repair it, or at least, make it look repaired by putting the door back on its frame. I however couldn't reattach it to its hinges.

Toothless just walked inside, shaking his head, though he still smiled.

The inside thankfully wasn't as much of a mess, I hadn't been in there much anyways. The others followed in; the currently human members sitting down on the chairs near the fireplace. The rest of us "dragons" gathered by them on the ground. I lit the fireplace and created a bit more warmth.

My little brother looked at me, his smile still bright and holding up his items. "It all worked out in the end," he said. "I come home a hero!"

"Must be great," I said, trying not to sound a little bit jealous. I mean, I had only been a "hero" once and that turned out nicely, didn't it?

Toothless, not seeming to notice, let out a chuckle and dropped Mildew's things down nearby. "We'll never have to worry about him again, well, hopefully."

I blinked. "Wait, I thought you were going to kill him?"

Toothless shrugged. "He's not a threat anymore."

Stormfly and Camicazi both sent him skeptical looks, as if wondering if my brother would be right. Astrid and Fishlegs too seemed hesitant about that being a good thing.

Well, hopefully this didn't bother us in the near futureâ€¦ "I hope you're right." On the one hand, I'm kinda glad Toothless didn't kill the old man out of revenge on my behalf, on the other, what happens if Mildew showed up again.

"Yeah, everything, well, near everything, turned out alrightâ€¦"

I frowned. "'_Near' _everything?"

"Eh, kinda near," Camicazi explained. "Everythin's fine, ya seeâ€¦"

Stormfly probably would have added in something, but Camicazi shushed her.

Fishlegs, Astrid, and I all gave them strange looks. What was it they were hiding?

"Uh, brother?" I asked, seeming concerned.

Toothless shrugged. "It doesn't matter right now, I'll tell you later." My brother's grin returned and he turned to see Astrid and Fishlegs. "So, what happened while I was away? Aside from well..."

Fishlegs let out a little blush.

"Our Kin are done," said Astrid. "They serve me now under the command of my Knights." She eyed Stormfly in particular, as if to single her out.

Stormfly gave an annoyed expression. "I had things to do; you'd have done the same if it was Hiccup!"

Astrid rolled her eyes. "And which of those who has better plans?"

"Toothless!" Stormfly replied, her face turning slightly pink.

Astrid beamed. "We both knows the wrong answer!"

"Hey!" my brother bellowed.

Camicazi chortled, apparently amused even though she could only understand half of the conversation. Fishlegs and I could only look at each other as the conversation briefly descended into a spat between Astrid and Stormfly over me and my brother. Even Toothless, who had been offended earlier dropped out once the conversation got heated enough.

"Uh, guysâ€¦" I uttered in the middle of their bickering.

That at least managed to pull both girls out of the conversation. They both glared daggers at each other.

"Okay, so, uh, Hiccup, what else happened?" said my brother seeking to move away from the earlier argument.

I cringed. Now seemed like a good as a time as any to let my friends know. I didn't tell anyone about what happened last night, not even Astrid, because this kind of information really needed to be deployed at the right time; now seemed like that time. "We only have two days left to prepare to face the King."

If there was anything anyone else wanted to say then and there, it died in their throats.

Even Camicazi who didn't understand me speaking, seemed to know just how important what I said was. "Okay, that sounded bad" she muttered.

Toothless stuttered "What" what happened?"

"I met my grandfather," I said to them. Stormfly at this point started relaying my speech.

"But isn't he supposed to be lost at sea!?" said Fishlegs.

I shook my head. Technically, I don't think he was my grandfather as I knew him, but that was something I had to deal with next time I saw him. "No. He's like me and everyone else down my mother's side; he can change into a Night Fury, remember? He served the King once" now he tells me we have little time left before we can't stop him."

Toothless took out his cloak and lifted the bundle cautiously, like it was a deadly barrel full of explosive Zippleback gas. "Yeah, this cloak belonged to him, right?"

I nodded. "Do you remember what your teacher, One Eye, told you before he died? Grandfather said it'd be important."

Toothless frowned, "Well, alright, let me see if I can remember." He then contorted his face into a strained look, as if he was trying to get something out of his body.

While my brother was out wracking his brain, I turned towards the others. "What preparations do you think you can prepare?"

Astrid grinned, as if the news went from something terrifying to something that delighted her. "I've got something in mind.

I nodded. Okay, if my girlfriend was already on the ball and had something just seconds after I told her; either she was planning to betray me" or she had something big already. "Good, whatever it is, we'll need it two days from now."

She snorted. "That won't be a problem."

Fishlegs gave me a sheepish grin. "Yeah, it won't" Although I had a feeling that he wasn't particularly comfortable about it.

Stormfly and Camicazi had uncertain looks. "Dunno if my Mum would want to help me out in this," Camicazi admitted. "You know how she is."

Unfortunately, I knew how that was. "Whatever you can pitch in, it'd be nice," I said to her, Stormfly relaying it for me.

"Alright, I think I got it," Toothless declared.

We all turned to him, moment of truth. "'A fang of divinity, long and sharp. It's power great, its legend greater. Can only be mended by one with a golden heart.'"

I digested those words. Okay, so a broken fang, one apparently with great power. But how were you supposed to use a fang anyways. Were there any such fangs in dragon history?

I turned to Fishlegs, "You know anything about legendary fangs?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "I'll have to bring Meatlug, but she's currently trying to settle the matter of how one can't steal chickens, but I can't say I heard of anything from her."

I frowned. Okay, so, what if 'fang' wasn't literal? Being long and sharp, dragon fangs can certainly get big, but being long and sharp kinda makes them impractical to be used by my hands, er paws. I don't recall collecting fragments of dragon teeth either and that piece grandfather gave me was a hunk of metal, so I doubt any dragon had metallic teeth. What about a weapon, like a sword?

I told that to my friends and asked "Is there anything else?"

"Uh... 'There sits the Guardian, roasting the Corrupt One's heart. Better he should eat it himself' and uh, what's wrong with your eyes?" Toothless muttered, but that wasn't important to me right now.

A sword. A Guardian. A Corrupt one devouring a heart... Wait, really?

I turned to Fishlegs, his eyes wide with surprise. He had the same idea too. "Why would Kin know about that?" he asked, hesitantly.

I shook my head. "Probably my grandfather told him; they were close apparently."

"Wait, what's going on? What?" questioned my brother.

I turned to Astrid, she too had the same expression as Fishlegs did. "... Someone must really think this whole situation is funny," she muttered, shaking her head.

"Welcome to my life!" I declared with a cheer.

"Wow..." Camicazi uttered, having the words being translated by Stormfly

"Can someone tell us what the big deal is?" Stormfly

demanded.

"Yeah, we're kind of lost here," Toothless spoke.

I shone an uncomfortable grin. Right, sometimes, I forget that my brother never grew up with required reading the same way everyone else did. Now, how to explain this when a good chunk of the words were Norse only? "The 'fang', the weapon. It's called 'Wrath'. The irony being, it was used to kill a guy who became Kin out of greedâ€|"

Toothless still looked at me like I had no idea what I was saying.

I sighed. Right, we had to take it slow. Short version granddad wanted me to reforge Gram, a sword whose name translates to "wrath". At first, it was Odin's sword, but eventually it made its way to a man named Sigurd, who then used it to kill Fafnir, basically, a guy so greedy, he turned himself into a dragon.

Once we were done explaining that story to them, everyone had a frown on their faces, the thought sinking in over what was being asked of us. For one thing, I realized now that Alvin's spear was not a spear, so much as a broken sword blade mounted atop a piece wood. As for the hilt, I recall the one mother took from that treasure cave so long ago that started thisâ€| and the hunk of metal my grandfather gave me was that very hilt after years of abuse and rust taking their toll.

"Uh, why does these sword's pieces turn people into dragons?" Toothless wondered aloud.

I shrugged. "I don't know, I don't know why it's in pieces, either!"

"Maybe it's cursedâ€|." Fishlegs supplied. Which given all the things we've seen the pieces do and the suffering they inflict, that might have been the right answer.

I shook my head. "It doesn't matter; if we can restore the weapon, we might stand a chance against the King." If I recall right, Gram could split an anvil just by being dropped on it. Granted, I did that once myself using a walnut, but maybe I shouldn't judge. If there was any weapon that could ever give me and my friends a fair shot at winning this, Gram might just be it.

"Okay, soâ€| assuming we do get manage reforge the sword and it possesses the power you think it does," Stormfly questioned. "How are we going to get close enough to use it on the Red Death?"

I cringed. That was an even more important question. How?

Astrid stepped forward, flashing a large almost malicious seeming grin. "Because he will let us," said the Nadder.

Everyone blinked. "What? Astrid?" Suddenly, I thought my girlfriend might be under the King's control after all.

"The King is hosting a celebration commemorating his soon release," said my girlfriend. "We will crash the party."

"Are you sure, I'm the one who comes up with the crazy plans in this relationship?"

Astrid's grin grew wider. I had to wonder; had she been planning this behind my back all along? "Just remember, Kin only."

****And now, we begin the final arc. It's been a long time in the making.****

61. Chapter 61

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For the first time in a long while, I was not enthusiastic about meeting the Red Death once again. Over the past few weeks, I dreamt of our meeting, imaging myself the victor, the hero of the story. I would have everything I'd ever wanted; Mom and Dad would be home at last, I could get on with my life. Hiccup and I could then spend the rest of our days trying to out do each other at various things where it be blacksmithing, at flying, at well, "Vikinging"â€¦ Stormfly said she'd want to do something, too...

But now, I feel so uncertain about it, second thoughts creeping into my head - just as we were about to leave for the main event, too. Dawn had come, signaling just how limited our time was.

Hiccup stood overlooking the cliffside, along with Astrid, hammering the final preparations over her so called Flight; those that we had taken from Fort Sinister as well as a small number of curious humans who wanted to learn more about what "natural" dragons were like. Gobber, also nearby, was strapping on Hiccup's latest experimental project, granted, by his own admission, the whole thing had to be stripped down to its barest essentials.

As for me, I overlooked the new sword I had in my scabbard. It was that blade Hiccup was so desperate for me to forge, that Gram or "Wrath". The thing was easy to reforge, I could have done it blindfolded, but I honestly can't help but feel the effort was not going to pay off. I didn't feel anything unusual about it and it was a plain looking sword. At least with that dull looking blade I found when hunting Mildew had something of a special power, but Gram certainly didn't feel like anything special. Regardless, I was going to have to take it with me, since Hiccup obviously can't.

"Sir Knight?" I heard a voice call behind me.

I turned.

It was just one of the actual dragons. A Gronckle. He sounded so uncertain talking to me like that. I didn't blame him. I was an anomaly on two levels; I was both human, meaning I was something that wasn't supposed be spoken to at all and yet I was also someone knew because quite frankly, every dragon knew about me. He spoke once he saw I was paying attention to him. "Uh, yourâ€¦ Kin need you."

I sighed. I think the thing that bothered me the most about about this whole plan. The fact that ultimately, I had to go back to my roots. I had to show up dressed in a disguise for people I grew up

with; being made a Knight, even unofficially also added a sort of bitter taste to my mouth. I adorned my Night Fury cloak, all of my equipment, sword included, vanished under a layer of scale. "I'll be there," I told the dragon. "Rally them."

The dragon nodded.

I shook my head and then considered if this was all going to be worth it in the end. What I had to do was going to be humiliating on so many levels, yet tradition demanded it.

Giving in, I walked past my brother and his girlfriend and strode past a number of my friends as they made their final preparations.

"Uh, are you sure about this?" I could see a sneak peek of Camicazi, holding up an etched teapot in her hands.

"Come on!" Ruffnut demanded.

"You said you wanted to!" added Tuffnut.

Both of the twins had an energetic movement in their bodies, as if they could hardly contain themselves.

Camicazi seemed rather hesitant. "Shouldn' we uh, givin this to Thuggory first? Assuming he decides to go!"

The twins both rolled their eyes, as if the answer bored them. "Well, maybeâ€¦" admitted Tuffnut. "Ow!" For which he earned a reply from Ruffnut.

"So then whatever happened about wanting to be a Changewing?" teased Ruffnut. "Don't you wanna?"

"Eh, I lie abou' a buncha things!" said Camicazi, evasive. "Sides, aren't you both gonna get turned, too? "

"It would be coolâ€¦Ow!" Tuffnut, again being beaten on the head by his sister.

"Butâ€¦ we thought you'd get the first drink!" encourages Ruffnut.

Camicazi let out a chuckle. "You're just sayin' dat because you're afraid of ending up a Zippleback and being stuck with each other all the time!"

"NO!" both twins protested with the same reply. They both turned to look at each other with awkward looks.

From behind them, two more voices let out an amused laugh. Barf and Belch, an actual Zippleback, overlooked the trio with satisfaction.

"It's not that bad," laughed Belch.

"I don't know, having a seperate body is kinda niceâ€¦" said Barf.

Belch just looked at his companion with a look very similar to Tuffnut's of his sister.

Camicazi sighed. "I guess if anything, Mum won't ever find me! She couldn't find one when she was trying to race Mogadon in a hunt..."

I shook my head and moved on. Whether Camicazi or the twins would turn or not was not something I was going to stick around to find out. With the Alvin's spear and the hilt mother discovered and reforged into Gram, the only way to turn people into dragons was to take the potion that started my brother's part of the adventure. And given that this function we were attending was very limited to who we could bring, everyone who wanted to show up needed to make a sacrifice.

Next, in one of the sheds, I saw my cousin Snotlout fumbling his way through a familiar black book. Firewrym and Hookfang right beside him, facing what looked to be Thuggory tending towards a fire.

Thuggory had come earlier today from the neighboring island. He was alone, his father denying him any other support in protest, but he came to lend us as much of a hand as he could. He spoke, turning his gaze to Snotlout. "Alright, once this little drink is done, you think you can do something to get yourself changed? Maybe dip yourself in some fire?"

Snotlout cringed, looking tense. "I don't know if I can do that."

Hookfang placed a hand over Snotlout's back, as if to give him a bit of silent reassurance.

Firewrym instead studied the boy with curiosity.

"Look, I mean, it's great and all that you volunteered to help and all, but I mean, going to pick a fight just isn't me! I mean, there's got to be more important things in life than dying gloriously!" said Snotlout.

That made me give a double take, as did Thuggory and Firewrym. All of us knew Snotlout enough to tell that was a bold faced lie.

"What?" questioned my cousin.

Thuggory squinted. "Okay, Snot, be real. Is this about your father?"

Snotlout seemed to gulp. "... No."

"My host does disapprove of him turning! as do I," Firewrym commented. "That is probably what has him worried."

Hookfang nodded. "Last time, his father kicked him out of the house until he got fixed..."

"Hey!" Snotlout protested, as if that information was something he wasn't keen on sharing to people who didn't already know. I think only Thuggory and Firewrym were the only two who weren't

aware.

"Ohâ€|" Thuggory shook his head. "Snot, you've got to come. Stop, you know, living in his shadow."

Snotlout did a quick look around. "Don't say that!" he protested.

Thuggory sighed. "Snot, we got to talk about thisâ€|"

However, I quickly moved past them and away out of earshot. I didn't have a chance to hear what Thuggory wanted to discuss. Quite frankly, I didn't even have the time to listen in.

Moving past even them and moving down one of the ramps that led downward, I leapt my way down to the bottom of the cliff facing and headed to the docks. Just before I was at my destination I found Fishlegs along with Meatlug. They sat over by one of the piers.

(Singing)

I really wish I could tune that out, but the noise was something my extremely sensitive ears just couldn't tune out. Seriously. I have never heard of any worse dragonsong. Meatlug though, an accomplished bard who should have found the entire thing revolting, didn't seem to mind, as she pounded her tail softly into the wood she laid upon.

I will never understand why.

After a few more steps and going as far away from them as I could, I found myself right where I needed to be. At one of the piers was a ship. Unlike any other ship, its crew consisted entirely of dragons. Oh, and unlike any reasonable ship, I was the captain. And yet, none of that made me feel better.

My crew, myâ€| Wing, about somewhere nearly two dozen dragons stood on the pier, chatting it out amongst themselves. But as I stepped forward and made my arrival they all became silent, and turned to give me attention.

I felt uneasy in myself. When I was young, I always thought I would become a good Knight and earn a personal Wing, a small subflight. When I became, well, human and learned about ships and boats and sailing, I thought it would be a good idea to have one for myself. Now I had both of those all rolled into one and the very thought of it sent shivers down my spine.

I stepped forward and greeted my Kin. Well, more accurately, tried to get a topic that wasn't about me. "Myâ€| Kin," the words felt almost alien to me now. It's been so long I thought of dragons, any dragon as being my Kin. Yet I had to use it. "How goes things?"

They all gave each other uncertain looks, as if wondering what the right response. Most of these dragons knew about me from my past, now I was here as their leader due to succession issues. Not a good first impression.

I tried to take control by setting up things. "Where's Knight Stormfly?"

"Overhere!" a voice called.

I turned towards the front of the ship and stepped further until I could see my new co-Knight from behind a pile of barrels. She had with her a few humans who were busy tying ropes to her body. "You're getting ready."

"Not the most fashionable attire, but it beats showing up all coated in sea water," she muttered.

I grinned. "Yeah, I don't think any of this is traditional." And I think that applied to both dragon _and human _sides of the equation. I mean, for one, we kind of had to remove the sail since no one on board would be able to use one. Stormfly is hooking herself up because the whole point was that it would be controlled via pull or push from dragons. Not efficient by any means, but this was an improvised thing.

The dragons turned to me, questioning. "My liege, what is thisâ€¦ thing for? What use does this have?" one spoke, but others shared the same question.

"Offerings," I said. "Tradition demands that we bring forth our offerings at feasting. This is our means to do so."

"But why not our mouths as is custom?" asked another.

"Because we can bring a whole lot more using this," I said. One of the first things I noted about ships was their sheer utility in hauling things. Seriously, humans could really cash so much just because they had nets and they didn't need to constantly dive in and headback to land to deposit their fish. Not to mention just transporting things was faster overall. "The inside is full of containers and food. We will bring these the King my Kin and earn ourselves prestige."

That thought suddenly made the dragons, my Kin more comfortable. See, in order to do what Hiccup wants to do, my brother needs more prestige, glory, and fame in order to pull off this latest stunt he cooked up. And for that, I needed to make sure our offering as "guests" was the largest in quantity. Something I was sure we were going to win regardless. But we weren't going to stop there.

"We are also going to be using it to capture a whale and offer its carcass to him."

That made them less comfortable, counteracting my earlier statement. See, whale hunting was a really big deal to dragons. It was a lot of food in a single body and the meat was considered a delicacy due. The downside, whales tended to be huge and that meant unless you cut it up, it was hard to transport, even for multiple dragons.

"With this _ship_," I said, using one of the new words Meatlug and Fishlegs created to define a new idea to the dragons. "We should be able to carry our quarry to him. Now, I need more of you to get mounted to haul it."

A few of the dragons hesitated, but a few stepped forward at my command. They let the humans attach them to the ship with so simple

ropes. After fullfilling their part, the humans stepped off.

"I control the direction of where the ship goes," said Stormfly.
"Follow my lead at all times."

"You heard her," I confirmed and stepped forward. I turned back and spied at the cliffs above. The dragons that made up the other part of the Flight were massing towards the point where my brother was. They weren't going to be long now. We better find our quarry and make it to the island sooner rather than later. I let out a thundering roar to signal my leave.

Hiccup let out a reply in much the same voice.

I turned back to my crew, my Wing. Everyone had gotten aboard the ship or proceeded to fly in place at this time, antipcating our leave. "We're leaving. We'll rendezvous at the island before long."

Stormfly and the other pulling dragons then took off all at once, taking the ship out of the docks and slowly into the sea. Those who weren't aboard the ship took to the skies. It didn't take us long to be out in the open waters away from any land in the gulf between Berk and my former homeland.

Several of my crew turned to me, looking for orders.

"Start searching," I answered. "But stay near the ship. Report if you find anything."

They bowed and then scattered, taking off or diving below. As the leader of this expedition, it went to me to also lead the hunt. I, too, submerged.

Unlike human eyes, dragon eyes were very adjusted to seeing underneath the waves. From above, I could see the tendrils of sunlight slowly dissipate into the darkness below. That was where being a Night Fury came into play. I had a sense of hearing able to pick up on noises from far distances. It was nowhere near as effective underwater, but it was enough to at least echolocate if there was something in my area.

Stormfly led her team to slowly creep the ship ever forward, just enough to keep themselves from falling into the drink. Each of the hunting dragons scattered throughout the area, staying in close enough proximity to atleast make out each other. On one flank was one of the Nightmares who moved in an almost serpentine fashion, while the other contained a Gronckle who acted more like an underwater floater than anything else.

We scoured the seas and the search didn't take long. Maybe an hour into the search, I could hear a muffled noise penetrating deep underwater, a shrill noise that I could barely seperate from the ocean's currents. I turned skyward and made for the surface, prompting the others to come follow as I did.

I turned towards and found one of the Nadders circling in a wide arc over head. "Whale!" he cried. "Near the surface!"

I blinked. Well, that was fast. Obviously, whales were big, much

bigger and heavier than most dragons, especially the males. I'm pretty sure that only a handful of Breeds were in that weight category. In fact, I had to wonder if maybe it was a bit too big. Could the ship even carry that load? Especially with all the food we already have? Would we have to strap it to the bottom of the craft to haul it? I shook my head. It'd be just a simple matter of lifting it up and finding out. "Get your weapons," I told my crew as I burst from the water.

They all looked at me with confused looks, as I hoveled in place. "Uh, why do we need Herd things?" questioned the Nadder who spotted the target.

I frowned. This was going to take some time getting used to. "We don't have time for that," I urged and then flew off. As I approached, I told my co-Knight the news. "Stormfly, we've got our target!"

"Perfect, I was getting tired of just flying so slow!" she barked. "Alright, full speed ahead." She turned the ship in the direction the other Nadder instructed her too. Out in the distance, I could see that he had been right. There was a whale there, still staying near the surface.

As Stormfly edged the ship ever closer to our target, I meanwhile decided to prepare for the hunt.

Vikings had a method to whaling. They would drive the creature to shallower waters and beach it where the thing would suffocate and die under its own weight. It involved noises to frighten the creature, the ship to be used as blocks and then it involved keeping the whale afloat via some means and stabbing it with spears or harpoons. Dragons did something more direct. It involved jumping into the water and biting at the prey and hoping it bleeds out before escaping. It didn't always work. Whales were big enough to endure most everything most dragons could do to it and live another day. and firebreath for most dragons just didn't work under the waves. I decided on a different method, something hopefully more reliable than previously.

I snapped up a harpoon that was installed in a spot near the back end of the craft. As I did, a mechanical spool unlocked, releasing a small length of the rope that bound the thing to the ship. Several of the more daring dragons took their own harpoons, each extending their own line of rope.

I grunted in satisfaction and then took off, extending my length of rope further. The whale hadn't took notice of us yet and that was when I struck.

I divedbombed and impaled the beast on with my harpoon, penetrating deep into the creature's large hide. Others took after my example and struck it with their one spears, some not as deep as others.

The whale, finally, alerted and in pain thrashed in every direction and tried to shake us off. If we had simply been biting directly onto the creature itself, I might have been forced off, but my teeth were still stuck tight around my spear. Blood splattered and poured out right in front of my face, but the creature still didn't die.

Unfortunately, I think I might have underestimated the whale's durability. It hadn't simply up and died. No, instead, as it bled, it began to submerge, taking use dragons along for the ride as it plunged to the bottom. A few of us were flung off, taken a back or forced to let go as it sunk beneath the waves.

I gripped my teeth tighter onto my harpoon and tried to sink it deeper into the creature's thick body. My claws dug in to its hide again, but I knew those were only minor scratches.

But as it turned out, there was a reason for the harpoons having rope. As the whale tried to plunge deeper, its rapid descent was suddenly halted. The ropes attached to our harpoons were tightly strung and stretched to their limits. If the whale wanted to pull it self deeper, it was going to have to overcome the innate buoyancy of the ship itself. And not only that, it had to fight against the lifting ability of five dragons in flight and that was much greater than men with paddles or the wind by itself. And then there were all of the other dragons fighting against it by trying to wrestle it underwater.

Gotcha.

The whale had stalled and was being forced upward. Now all we had to do wasâ€¦|

Suddenly, I just realized that the rope on my harpoon had come loose. The rope had broken! I turned towards the ship and tried to see what was going on.

Okay, I underestimated the whale again. Not only were several of the spools for the harpoons broken off their mountings, the entire ship was definitely being slowly pulled under. This was bad...

The whale inched ever downward, thrashing to shake us off. Several of the dragons were all forced up at the same time, either now reaching the maximum depth or running out of air. I hurried grabbed onto the nearest available harpoon that still mounted to its reel. More dragons were forced to surface and pretty soon, I knew I was going to have to break for it too.

Our target was going to get freeâ€¦| or if the rope was still fastened to it, the entire ship was going to go down with it. I couldn't bring it down on my own, not at this depth. There had to be something I had to do.

I took a risk and let go on my harpoon. The whale was still struggling to get free, still nearly immobilized. I swam forward until I was close to one of its eyes. It was barely visible at this depth, but I could see the glint of light reflected off it. It saw me and I could see it. In a way, this reminded me about how my brother and I met for the first time, one the hunter and the other the prey. Unlike Hiccup though, I had much less hesitation over striking.

I snapped my teeth and struck the creature there, right in a vulnerable spot.

It reeled in sudden shock and surprise, a dark cloud of blood seeping from the new wound. I choose now to be a good time for me to

resurface and propelled myself upwards as fast as I could. I broke the surface in a heartbeat and drew in the first bit of fresh air I could, but that was short lived.

The whale came surfacing right underneath me and I found myself standing right ontop of the creature, it having been forced to surface from the blow I struck.

"Attack!" I shouted, still gasping for breath. "Quickly! While it's stunned!"

My crew, my Wing, came down on the whale a second time, this time without the harpoons. Instead, they blasted the creature with flame and tore at its flesh. Some, taking the opportunity to select other vital areas struck at its tail and fins, disabling it much the same way the same attacks might have harmed a dragon. The damage we dealt at the first pass might have been survivable if enough time was spend healing; however, now the creature was crippled and unable to flee. It wallowed there at the surface, kept aloft by its own body.

It didn't last much longer.

Soon after, Stormfly steered the ship close to it and we did what we could to haul the creature onboard using the last of the ropes and really clever synchronized flying. The thing took up half the deck and would have probably would sunk the ship if it had been any larger and heavier. Strangely, after that, my Wing had been giving me odd looks, not sure what they were about, but they didn't seem to hesitate to fly behind me.

"It's probably an adolescent, not a full grown bull," commented Stormfly as she steered our haul towards our destination.

I sighed, flying right nearby the team of ship pullers. I loathed the idea I had to offer this catch to my greatest foe, but this was needed. "I am really starting to hate attending festivals."

Stormfly let out a snort. "Is it because you nearly die whenever one is involved."

I rolled my eyes. "I think at this point, I nearly die every few weeksâ€¦"

Out in the distance, we could see just ahead of us was a small mass of dragons heading over to the Red Death's lair, their direction indicating they were from Berk. It was most likely my brother and his accompanying Flight. We weren't going to reach them, their position was too far off and our speed was too slow.

If the ship was in better condition, Stormfly and her team could have tried to raise their speed and hauled the boat faster. As it was, this ship of mine probably was never going to sail again. Well, good thing we didn't have a sail. Too much was damaged in trying to keep the whale from escaping and on top of that, the craft had to now carry a load of several tons all on one place. Speeding up might cause us to sink.

We hung back and advanced slowly. I figure Hiccup would understand. Hopefully, he doesn't run into any trouble on the way over.

As we neared the lair, I noticed something that bothered me greatly.

"Where's all the fog?" I spat. Right in the field of sea stacks that surrounded the King's domain, there should have been a blanket of fog, an obscuring mist that kept anyone from seeing everything for miles. In fact, I was perfectly sure that under normal circumstances, you shouldn't be able to even gaze at the distant island at the center of the field. Something was up.

I turned to all of the other dragons and sought answers from them. None of them seemed to know what happened either, meaning this was a recent development.

"What happened here?" asked Stormfly. "Is this the King's doing?"

I shook my head. "Most likely." I have no idea why he would dispell the fog like that. It was an integral part of the island's defenses against invasion... unless maybe he deemed it no longer necessary. Steeling myself, I decided not to dwell on that even more. "We better get a move on, Hiccup's waiting for us."

Stormfly directed her team to go into the fogless seas, taking our craft with them. Gronckles who had very stable hovering acted as guides, steering the ship away from any rocky outcroppings and walls. Other, larger dragons pushed the ship from behind, using their physical strength.

Entering this place seemed almost disorienting, despite how visible everything was. I have expected us to be returned to the exit, being forced to warp around in seemingly random directions, yet we still kept going forward. It felt as if the idea that "straight" and "direct" seemed almostâ€¦ unreal or unbelievable. Why weren't we being turned around?

Before I knew it, we were at the island, right smackdab into what was possibly the most important even in dragon history. From above, I could see a thick cloud of bodies flying in the air.

I don't think I had ever seen this many dragons before, many of them from different Breeds I didn't recall. Many of them were probably from different Enclaves or minor nations. I bet that for all the groups in the Archipelago, at least one person came from each of them, maybe a dozen.

I didn't have to concern myself with strangers much longer as I spotted a familiar looking Night Fury. Hiccup and Astrid stood at the nearby beach surrounded by their Flight as well as a few dragons I didn't recall seeing before, maybe some of our friends. I wondered for a moment why they were there instead of joining all of the others, but then I took notice of who was there in front of them.

I urged my Wing to head closer and saw possibly the one Terror I loathed seeing the most. "I deny you access, be gone!" snapped the tiny dragon. He sat ontop of a stone and seemed to command a sort of authority a dragon of his size normally doesn't present. It probably helped he had much larger dragons acting as his escort. "Leave, enemy of our King!"

"Gee, and here I thought the festivities were open to all Kin," my

brother retorted.

"You are not Kin," said the Terror, words dripping with venom.

"Good!" replied Hiccup, his tone trying to sound as vaguely innocent as it could. "I'm not sure I want to be related to a lying lizard anyways."

The tiny dragon hissed, knowing it was meant for him.. "Leave this place. You did not even come to present offerings you are...

I decided to interject with a little yip, bringing both my part of the Flight and our offering into view.

"You were saying?" Hiccup said.

Ruseclaw hissed something and turned towards the center of the island. "Very well, but cause any trouble and you'll be destroyed."

"Oh, we'll behave," Astrid spoke. "Isn't that right?" she turned to the other dragons behind her.

I don't know whether that was supposed to be sarcastic or not, but I could see that my friends and allies didn't utter a word.

I landed right next to them. My wagged with a slight charge of excitement, as if the coming hours were going to be the most enjoyable yet. "Oh, I'm sure I will."

Now, I know that there's probably going to be some people thinking whale hunting is cruel or evil, but bear in mind, this was a long time ago when such was common place. Vikings lived in a time and a climate that quite frankly required people to find and kill anything and everything for food because of minimal agriculture. Sympathy for animals is a modern notion born out of self awareness of how powerful humans had become.

62. Chapter 62

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I know why you have come, the voice said in my head. It was the King speaking to me in a tone that had nothing to do with speech. He had remained silent towards me, holding up his end of the bargain to leave me alone, until now anyways. He probably never ever expected me to show up on his doorstep and decided that for a moment, maybe he didn't need to stay silent. He probably saw my coming here as a breach in contract. **"Since it seems you are intent on harming yourself, I see no reason to uphold my end of the bargain!" **His voice boomed loud all around me, as if I was inside his mouth and listening to him yell at me. He was everywhere and around me, I could feel his presence saturating every nook and cranny of the island, much more thoroughly than the last time I was here. **"I grow stronger with each passing moment,*** the King spoke again as if answering me **"Now why have you come to do this?***

Because this was something I had to do. Something that really, only I could do. I had family to get back and a life back home that seriously was hampered by me not having opposable thumbs.

"**You are such a fool,**" said the King. "**Nearly anything anything else would have been preferable toâ€¦ that..." **An image of my human body flashed for a split second in my head, not that I needed it to know what the King thought of me being human.

I knew I was a fool and I was likely going to get maimed or crippled in executing this plan. I've come to accept that. It's not all that different from everything else I have done.

I could practically feel the King letting out some sort of defeated sigh in my own head. "**If I cannot stop you from beginning this madness, I know can prevent you from carrying it out to its fullest. Come find me and do your business," **he dared.

Good. Wouldn't expect anything less of him. Because obviously doing things the simple way was far above us advanced Kin. We need to do things as complicated and by the book as possible.

If I could see him, I think the King was glaring at me with one of his multiple pairs of eyes. He didn't speak, but I felt his presence nearly choking the life out of me, like I was being smothered. And then suddenly, he left, maybe deciding that he no longer had anything more to say to me. Maybe challenging me to come soon.

As I turned my gaze down from the sky and onto the ground, I oversaw the forces and allies I had brought into this last battle. Toothless stood alongside Astrid, informing her of certain specific behaviors and cues expected of a Flight Commander, things that he picked up over a lifetime. Off to the side, sat Meatlug and Fishlegs talking about various folk tales and stories as if trying to forget the doom that lie ahead of us all, I know I wish I could. Hookfang was trying to keep Snotlout from bolting, as if my cousin was ashamed of showing up here as a Nightmare, meanwhile Firewrym eyed him suspiciously.

Aside from the various members of the Flight, I could see the two newest members to our little club. To basically nobody's surprise, Camicazi ended up turning into a Changewing, just just like she claimed to want. Granted, I don't think she ever wanted to constantly be purple all the time, she sticks out like a sore thumb and clearly isn't quite ready to do anything sneaky. Thuggory, maybe because someone up there liked irony, became a Rumblehornâ€¦ just like Skullcrusher. At least I could say he's not being cryptic or following advice from my grandfather.

But I think the biggest surprise had to be what happen to the twins.

"Come on, let us down!" complained Tuffnut towards Barf and Belch. The Zippleback heads remained silent carrying a rather unusual burden by their backs.

Ruffnut added. "Well, I told you taking it was a bad idea! Now we're stuck like this!"

"Well, if only you were a boy, maybe it'd have worked like it should

have!" Tuffnut countered.

"Uhuh, now if _you were _a girlâ€|" mused his sister.

"What? Girls are gross!" countered Tuffnut.

I could see both Barf and Belch practically grinning, as if amused.

See, all this time all of us would think both of them would turn in a Zippleback. Apparently, we were wrong, and both of them ended up turning into Terrible Terrors, probably because they were both so terrible and frightening to everyone nearby them. Honestly, I guess it's best this way, because at least now, they're both more manageableâ€| and we don't get to find out what happens when one half of a Zippleback transforms without the other.

Finding everything else to my liking, I turned my attention towards Stormfly who was currently barking orders to our dragons, forming up a team to ensure the whale and the rest of our foodstuffs would be hauled along with us. Meanwhile, a small contingent would form a guard perimeter to ensure that the hungry eyes that looked over us would not dare attack us.

Around us gathered a flock of dragons, all probably curious about the fact that we, "Kin" brought a Herd vessel into the King's domain. Especially since I was sure word had gotten out of who we were. Others were more interested in the Flight's, asking random members over the most trivial details. If I had to guess, at least some of them already knew each other.

I stepped towards Stormfly. "Is everything else ready?" I asked the one person who honestly was the best suited to being a Knight.

She nodded her head. "Sure, everyone's got something to carry, just remember to call yourself a Knight, that's your official title. Although, I don't understand why you had Toothless create thatâ€| thing you're wearing."

I looked over to my chest and decided that maybe that project made me stick out like a sore thumb. "Oh, that? Uh, well protection. Hopefully, it'll protect me." See, dragons, because they never had metalworking don't have armor of any sort. Gobber and my brother managed to compile a small set that consisted of plated held by chains and light patches of mail to cover my chest and parts of my upper body. The whole thing weighed probably as much as I really did and probably slowed me down by a lot. But I was sure I was going to need it for the trials ahead.

"Hopefully?" she eyed me. "You better hope it does. Because if you die."

"Astrid will kill me," I replied. I mean, I didn't know how she was going to kill me a second time after I died, but I felt my girlfriend was perfectly willing to do that.

Moving away from her, I then turned towards Astrid and my brother discussing Knightly etiquette. I'm actually kind of surprised my little brother who was otherwise kind of a mess when it came to manners knew things I didn't quite learn.

"Never bow to anyone, no other Kin save your King, deserves that from someone of your station" said my brother but his tone shifted into something bitter. "But as the King doesn't deserve that, you spit in his face." Or maybe notâ€|.

"Uh, guys," I called to them.

Both turned to me, their expressions becoming anxious. They knew what was up. Yup. Way to kill the mood.

"It's time," I said, especially notable because of how little time we had left. Dawn, like it always did during the summer was quick to come, giving us more time than normal in a day. However, my brother spent quite a bit finding his catch and now I think we had maybe two hours to state our business and declare our intent before the King grew too powerful and a few more just carrying it all out.

Both of them nodded and then went towards the others, signaling them to fall in line, alerting them to fall behind me as I started the walk through the center of the island. Nothing stopped us from advancing before save the needs of unloading the whole ship. I probably could have gotten the thing to fly if I had enough rope and if we weren't carrying a whale, but I felt this was the proper way to do it.

We set forth, the junior members carrying loads or hauling the whale across the ground behind the so-called "Knights". Meanwhile, me and my friends kept a close watch over.

During our brief stint on the beach, we made quite an impression, what with how vast our haul had been and the fact we bothered using a Herd vessel to supplement ourselves. The dragons around the Flight were growing ever anxious, yet more daring to poke in and get involved or speak amongst themselves.

"What happened to the Kin there? Why do they bother with a Herd tree bundle?"

"That Flight spent far too much time among the Herd."

"I heard that they can become Herdâ€|"

"And Deadwings's sons lead them? Why are they our enemies?"

"I heard they would not accept our King's sovereignty. Rebellion I say!"

"They might be no better than the rogues who live on Bloodspire Island."

"They have plenty of fish thoughâ€|"

"That's because they're cheating!"

"Unworthy of being here"

"Our Lord should destroy these invadersâ€| not treat them like guests."

"But aren't all Kin welcome?"

"Are they Kin?"

"I say we areâ€¦" I found exiting my lips.

The dragons who were gossiping about us all turned to look at not the Flight, but at me directly, eyes squinting and cautious. Astrid and Toothless gave me a tense look. I just returned them a simple shrug.

Like any meet up where I just show up, I've always been a subject of attention for one reason or another. People, whether they are dragons or not, speculate about me, draw conclusions about me or my life, my allegiances, my purposes. I have been called many things: not human, a beast, a menace, a threat, otherwise not part of the group. And now, I decided to speak upâ€¦ and not back down. "It's true though. I am 'Herd'." Ironically my way of proving things included backpedaling. "Born Herd, became Kin. You saw or heard of Astrid transform?"

A few of the dragons all gave uncertain expressions, though a few seemed to nod, turning to my girlfriend.

"So, the King made you what you are?"

"No," I said, shaking my head. "It's a long story, butâ€¦ I've lived a good chunk of my life as 'Kin' for a while now. But I don't think that's really what'll prove if I am 'Kin' or not."

"It's not?" said one of the dragons.

Toothless gave me a look. "Hiccup, are you trying to get them angry at us?"

"Well what does?" another asked cautiously.

I flashed Toothless a grin and spoke. "Well, all of the different Breeds all call themselves, Kin? Why not former Herd?"

Several of the dragons looked at each other, as if they were just only now noticing their companions were very different kinds of dragons. They were probably too distracted to make a judgement call together, which was good as far as I was concerned.

I saw Astrid roll her eyes as if she was expecting that.

Deciding to take advantage of the dragons's confusion, I asked them about something I felt they would easily answer forgive me. "Can you tell us where the King is? My Flight Commander and I, her Knight. would like to present our offerings to the King as well as discuss business with him. Where do we find him?" I thought that presenting myself in a context they would be familiar with, maybe they'd be more comfortable with dealing with us.

"Oh, uh," one of the dragons stuttered out an answer before turning his head towards a valley. "Right there, that's the start of the line."

There was a line. That might be a problem. I nodded to the dragon and

said my thanks.. "Thanks!" I then urged my friends to come follow me hoping to find this line.

As we kept going further, the beach and hard stony ground made way for a slowly rising forests. You wouldn't think that the island would have much in the way of vegetation what with all the fire breathers everywhere, but sure enough, there were lots of trees, some almost as big as the ones back home. To the side was the mountain, the volcano the King had been trapped in since the time of Hiccup the First. It still had the hole in its mouth for when the King burst through and attempted to grab me and my friends. And because of me, he might soon be free to roam the lands and conquer. I had no idea of how I was supposed to trap him back in there, or even how he was put there before, but first came the problem of beating him in the first place. It wasn't the only high place, either. The interior seemed to have a fair number of hills.

But as good as the scenery was, what caught my attention was the ever growing density of dragons. There were dragons everywhere, more specifically at our flanks were two lines dotted with stones, lining the road towards a large hill off in the distance where gigantic sets of eyes that looked at me looked down upon those willing to make an offering. Outside and inside of the dotted line of rocks, there were loads of groups off to the side, those who weren't here to deliver offerings or those who came to deliver tribute.

As we fell in line, the Flight and especially myself, became the subject of attention. Everyone's eyes turned upon us as if they noted that we were an unfamiliar presence in the normal order of things. Thousands of eyes locked gazes upon us, silent and judging as those on the beach. And unlike there, I doubted a few well placed words were going to shake a crowd this massive. And that's just counting the ones on the ground. Above, well, I can't call it "partly cloudy".

The ground beneath our feet was freshly overturned and I could tell that the line to the King was free of any foliage, as if the path was cleared just for the occasion. The King ahead looked down on a distant dragon who offered his food and the great dragon chanted a blessing before sending him off.

"Protocol," growled Toothless. "Audience with the King, he then chooses to bestow a reward or send you off. Can take a while depending on how big the offerings get, but I'm betting there's at least one big group like ours up ahead."

"We're going to be here forever" complained one of the twins in a high pitched whine.

I hated to say it, but I totally agreed with the twins. Time was of the essence. I turned back to my brother. "You know of any way to get there faster?"

But Toothless wasn't the one to respond to me. "Were it all doable, I'd give you the chance to go ahead me," said a bitter voice. I turned and saw a familiar looking dragon serpentine and bright gold and fired in tiny versions of itself turning to look at me. It was the Fireworm Matriarch, and yes, the irony of having Firewrym being called that isn't lost on me. "We meet again, young Night Fury and this time you come here a leader in your own right," spoke the

elder.

"Uh, we doâ€¦" I said to the matronly dragon. She seemed a littleâ€¦ upset, yet how was I supposed to draw attention to that. "Uh, is something the matter with you?"

She rolled her eyes as if the whole thing was deeply insulting to her. Her skittering brood looked like it was about to dart from some sudden danger, their own mother. "Only the loss of my independence and authority!" she spat in a bitter tone. "The King has despite his weakness at defending the Enclaves over the Winter now has the audacity to annex all the other free states. And he fully expects us to comply!"

Up until now, I never really thought much about the King's plans for forming an empire. I figured he was going to get together all of the little dragon inhabited islands under his banner, er wing, but I never considered just how they'd react to being forcibly annexed. I mean, they all sounded like independant Tribes last I saw them. It'd be like if Dagur tried to annex all the other Tribes.

"Well, he doesn't have the right to do so," Toothless spoke up, proactively and willing to voice his dissent. "You should go up there and refuse."

The Fireworm Matriarch groaned. "If only such were possible. I do not have enough support nor do I have the forces necessary to fight the King on my own. Most likely, my children and I would be made the direct Vassals of some Pompous Nightmares."

"Hey!" cried Snotlout, offended.

Hookfang just cringed awkwardly. "Oh, don't mind him."

The Matriarch turned and looked at me again and then at Astrid and then at the others as if she was probing them based on their looks. The little dragons by her side were also searching for something, even going to far as approach the twins who refused to let them come near. "... I don't truly understand the nature of this Flight of yours, especially since I know not all of you are Kin, not really at any rate."

Several of my friends gave awkward gulps, mostly those who were still getting used to their dragon bodies. Me and my brother though certainly didn't bat an eye. "Does it really matter?" I asked.

"No, not really. But if what I have heard is trueâ€¦ well, promise us our continued independence, and I will guarantee some of the Enclaves will support you in whatever way we can."

"Do we need their support?" Astrid questioned, eying the Matriarch intently. "She did try to stop us earlier."

"Politics, Dear," said the Matriarch.

I nodded. "I'll think about it." I don't know if I could fully trust the Fireworm Matriarch or know what kind of support she was talking about. Whatever it was though, I don't she was ever thinking of me ever using it the way I was thinking about using it.

The line advanced, taking us all forward several paces - a big group must have just finished their tribute.

The Fireworm Matriarch just shrugged. "Either way, as I have arrived before you, I must send Tribute before you as well. And I plan to see the King to let him know of my fury!"

"Just be careful." I said. I mean, I barely knew this dragon, but well, no one should really get killed.

She huffed, as if she didn't want my concern, and then stepped forward of her brood. Now that I actually paid attention to something other than her, I noted that the Fireworm's Enclave consisted entirely of small dragons, all the size of Terrors. But there were a lot of them, enough to form a carpet of living bodies up ahead of their "mother" maybe a dozen meters or so in each direction. Above several of the dragons was a pyramid of these golden colored blocks, maybe what they exported. I really would hate to see those small dragons lose their mother. Assuming of course, they were her children...

Snotlout moved up ahead, though it was clearly not of his own volition. Hookfang went up ahead and tried to explain something to the Fireworm Matriarch. I don't know, I couldn't quite hear with all of the chatter around us muffling their speech. Not that I wanted to bother in anyways. I had enough to worry about.

"How much time do we have left?" complained Toothless. "Anymore and we'll miss our chance. We should break protocol because he doesn't deserve it."

"And if we do that, we miss our one chance to challenge him directly," I replied.

Astrid commented next. "If we stay here, he could dictate our every move. Maybe let other Kin ahead of us, maybe refuse Tribute. It's smarter to get away from somewhere he could see it"

"Which he can't, not even the King can refuse given Tribute," Stormfly comment. "And last I checked, all of you believe he sees everything on the island."

I gulped. And everything I saw, including probably this plan. He didn't see any reason to challenge me and while he wasn't speaking, I could practically feel the pressure of his attention over me. "We have to abide," I said, still not revealing the secondary part of my deal with my friends. "He expects us to meet him, so we shall."

I felt something in the air shift and I knew the line had advanced as the Fireworm group stepped ahead. And then again, and again. It was as if the King was speeding up the process and I had an inkling idea of why.

Stepping forward, I turned to my friends. "See, we'll be there in no time." And not because I said the right words unintentionally and appealed to a great dragon's sense of law and order.

Toothless just rolled his eyes and sighed. "Now I wish it was slower"

Stormfly looked at my brother with a near tearful look and placed a wing over him. My brother didn't try to fight it. The twins had finally stopped struggling and resigned themselves to their fate, Tuffnut curled up on top of Barf's head, while Ruffnut did the same for Belch's. Hookfang and Snotlout still haven't come back yet, and Firewyrms came with them. Camicazi and Thuggory spent their time inspecting their bodies one final time, as if they were still trying to believe it was really their bodies. Strangely, Meatlug and Fishlegs were the only ones not together in this last moment, as if there was some need to be separate between them.

The other members of the Flight were just as anxious as I was and I could only imagine that they "being destroyed", "being traitors", and "subjected to the King's wrath". Especially since I had to wonder if the King might take it so far as to include their entire families just because of them; I certainly felt like he would.

As the line neared its destination and the King's head grew to the point that I was sure he'd have no problems seeing any of us individually, Toothless nudged my shoulder and then pointed his snout up onto one of the one of large hills that neared the King's. I looked up at it and... I felt my heart nearly freeze up.

"That's Momâ€¦" he said wistfully.

Up on top of that mountain, we both saw our mother, looking as much of a dragon as ever. She was speaking to a much larger dragon, one that we were sure never visited Berk with any regularity.

"I think that's a Stormcutter," we heard Fishlegs comment from behind. "I think they come up from further up north..." But we didn't pay him much attention, because both Toothless and I were very interested in what was happening above.

"Listen to me," said the Night Fury, her voice loud enough that we could hear it over all the interfering cries and calls. Or maybe we just wanted to hear it that badly enough we could tune out all the other noiseâ€¦ "You must tell your ruler to relinquish his authority and submit to the King."

But the multi-winged dragon let out a snort and shook his head. "My Lord does will not relinquish his rule so easily. He will not accept this proposal."

"Cloudjumper," said my mother. "If he doesn't, he will be made to."

The Stormcutter bowed his head low and let out a sigh. "Deadwings, we know each other well enough. And I don't think this will go over well. There will be blood."

"I know," said the Night Fury.

"Then why go through with this? There's been enough bloodshed in the past!"

Mother didn't answer, but I saw her head turn towards my brother and myself, slowly, as if she knew we were already there, spying. The Stormcutter, Cloudjumper, turned as well, noticing me and my brother and his head seemed to give off the idea he had realized something

important.

Toothless grabbed onto my paw and motioned us to go forward. "We're next," he muttered. "Everyone, ready?" he turned to the rest. The Flight, shifted and slowly fell into formation right behind Astrid and myself. Toothless and Stormfly fell right behind us, followed by the rest of my friends, then the rest of the Flight with the center column being given to the still fresh whale carcass.

As we organized and readied ourselves to presentation, the Fireworm Matriarch stepped forward, her children in tow. The stretch between the hill and the very end of the line was vast, big enough to make sure that even the largest groups could separate themselves from the ones still in line. Ahead, we could only see the King's massive head and shoulders, but that just only really made it clear that we were insects in comparison.

The little dragons, shivered at the sight of the King, but still went forward with their elder, hefting the golden prisms with them until she climbed up the hill. "Our nectar is yours," said the Matriarch. "But our liberty is not. We refuse to join."

The King's eyes all blinked in sequence, his head still and unmoving. Yet, maybe this was my paranoia getting the best of me, but I was very sure that the Fireworm Matriarch wasn't focus of the King's attention. **"You come from a small island with little else in the way Kindred save your own. You have little means of resisting."**

The Matriarch's head rose as if she was refusing to bow, but I could pretty much feel a tremble in her voice as she spoke. "I-I would be the one to end generations of independance!" The little dragons by her scattered in every which direction, toppling the pyramid of gold into a pile of random blocks. They were afraid to be anywhere near their Matriarch and feared the worst.

Instead, the King's massive eyes just focused on to the ground, unmoving. **"We shall see about it in time, you are dismissedâ€¦ for now." **

The Matriarch looked almost puzzled that the King wasn't eating her then and there and for a moment just stood there as if she hadn't thought beyond that. She shook her head and then proceed. Her smaller Kin recollected their blocks once they realized fiery doom wasn't going to fall atop them all and then dropped off their load off near the base of the Hill.

The Fireworms might have been confused by what just happened, but I think knew exactly what exactly was going on. The King had something in plan for me, something important enough.

**Step forward, Rogue Flight, and speak your business." **the King spoke, his voice ice cold.

Everyone shifted in their spots, but we all did, though some more quickly than others.

Astrid, Toothless, and I climbed up the hill, leaving the Tribute and the rest of our friend below while we stood face to face with the King.

When we reached the summit, I took note that the King in actuality was laying down on his belly and the hill was even smaller in comparison, and ourselves almost nonexistent, but being way in over my head wasn't going to stop me here.

"We give you our Tribute, Lord. Food from the sea's bounty, freshly caught by my people, Herd and Kin," Astrid declared.

The King's eyes darted for a moment onto the rest of the Flight, all the members who held fish loaded barrels or had a rope connected to the whale. **"And a feast it is,"** the King said satisfied. **"Such Tribute is rarely equalled my Court. But I know you have come here for more than this. Why are you here?"** **I** had the feeling he already knew, but just wanted to make the formalities very clear.

"Give us our parents back!" demand Toothless.

"Child!" a voice snapped.

We all turned and saw mother standing on the same hill than the one she was debating with the Stormcutter, but instead of that dragon, we saw a familiar looking Nightmare with a burning gaze.

Toothless didn't lower his head, and instead turned his gaze back towards the King as if to direct whatever bitterness he could.

"As you can see, your parents are here," **spoke** the great dragon. **"And you are both always free to join them. However, this day is the last day I will grant you amnesty so easily."**

"Good, because I don't want it!" spat my brother.

The King groaned. **"I regret to say that I expected that response. No doubt, you've come here for a singular reason, speak it now."**

Toothless looked at me as if to make sure we were on the same page.

I nodded my head and gave him a silent confirmation that, yes, I was going to have his back. The King was playing games, I knew. He was inside my head and saw much of my plans, I wager. There wasn't any point into hiding anymore, not like I expected to hide anyways.

I turned and looked around. Thousands of eyes looked at me, from the dragons on the ground gathered around the King to those flying up above. I had their attention, if only for a moment. "I, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third." My name sounded so strange in my mouth, but all the same, I had to recite it, make this counter. "Come before you now and challenge you, O King, over your Kingdom."

63. Chapter 63

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In the day of the King's Ascension, the day my service would finally end, I saw them. My sons stood at the central hill, everyone looking

at them as they made their stand, citing the most ridiculous thing anyone could ever conceive. The other Kin, from above and below, all gazed at wonder; the other Enclaves in particular spoke amongst themselves, wondering if this was the right thing to do.

My mate stood beside me, burning eyes filled with an uncertain fire. Something that wasn't quite hate or anger, but certainly not joy. His transfiguration was the most that I could make of it, but the King promised him safety and acceptance into this life. It isn't all bad and he's fairly the same, but there are a few differences. I wonder what he thought of this.

"**...You plan to Usurp me,"** the ancient muttered. He didn't sound so surprised if you ask me. Maybe he knewâ€| he always knew. **"A claimant desires a challenge over the right to rule my lands...then who am I to resist?"**

"THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!" a shrill voice called from the crowds, amplified by the almost uneasy silence of the gathering. It was my fellow Flight Commander, the Terror who lurked among men. "DO NOT ACCEPT THIS FARCE MY KING!"

The great one looked down upon them all as if he were weighing his thoughts, as he always did. I hoped he wouldn't harm my children over this. **"The Tribute is acceptable, for the ocean's bounty is great; their statement is clear." **

The Terror could only growl in frustration. "Theseâ€| children have no valid claim!"

His ancient gaze lowered onto the little dragon. **"Do not worry about this, for everything is fineâ€| though I would have preferred this incident wouldn't happen."**

As did I.

I wish my children didn't come here to speak such madness. Yet at the same time, I knew that this was because that's what they took from their father; the will to rise against challengesâ€| even when it meant facing down a god.

"Butâ€| here? Now?" argued the Terror. "My Lord, listen to me just this once; allowing them toâ€| challenge you is foolish!"

"**And it would be ignoble, dishonorable, to refuse," **spoke the ancient. **"I see no problem letting these children indulge their little fantasy." **

"While you are so close?" spoke the Commander. "You made me your advisor and seldom you have chosen to listen to me; why risk this now? They have no support, no backing, you can apprehend them for they could not resist..."

"We have the right," insisted my Hiccup, turning toward the rest of the Kin who looked on. "And the support, don't we?"

"They should challenge you!" declared one of the Kin.

"Yes! Let them fight!" said another.

"There's nothing against it," spoke yet another Kin, this time the Fireworm Matriarch.

"I support it, and I speak for my lordship!" spoke Cloudjumper, looking at me in the process.

More and more voices rose up showing support for the utterly insane proposition. It didn't take long for me to realize that it was the lords and speakers of the other Enclaves that were stirring popular support. They wanted to resist annexation by my Lord and if he couldn't rule, he couldn't usurp their domains. They knew they couldn't stand against the King any other way save militarily and that other option was going to be costly. The commoners flocked under their wings.

If I didn't know my King so well, I would have expected fire to wash over everyone on the hill, nothing lethal, but enough to knock them out. **"There you have it" the great one spoke and then turned to me and my mate. **"What of you? They are your children." **

Stoick, well, Stone Face's teeth shone. "Let them! They clearly want to fight!"

The King turned towards me, a frown beginning to show upon his face. **"This displeases you, Dead Wings." **I knew he could sense my hesitation.

I turned towards my husband and wondered if maybe he seemed a little too eager and then back to my Lord. I didn't want my children to get harmed against whatever challenges the King had in store. Yet, he was my Lord. On the other hand, my mate was right, my children came here for a single reason. "But my Lord, what challenges should they face? How do we test them?"

My children eyed me, suspiciously. Toothless's expression showed something like anger and I could tell he was still upset. Hiccup though was looking at me with a much easier expression, like he was trying to dissect my actions. The only of those three who didn't view me with suspicion was the Nadder.

The King's many eyes lowered back my children, unrevealing save an intent thought. **"I will test you challengers a number of ways, both yourselves directly and the trust you place on those you confide in. Thus is my decree: should you win, you inherit the right of lordship from me. But should you fall, you will stay within my domain and serve under me without question. Do you accept?"**

I hoped my sons would have the sense to say no, but I knew they were their father's sons after all. They nodded without hesitation.

Then first, Nadder whose name is 'beauty', take a talon-ful of your own exempt from this trial. Ruseclaw shall do the same. You will do battle in a test of leadership within my former prison.

My compatriot almost seemed to burst into rage, upset once again for his advice being dismissed. I never quite understood why he was a Flight Commander, especially with how often the King deliberately did not go after his advice. Though I don't think it is out of malice. Ruseclaw fumed but then stepped forward. "As you wish..." he

murmured.

"**Next shall be that bards, the Gronckles shall have their wisdom tested by the elders.**"

I turned towards the aisle and found the Gronckle known as bronze Meatlug. Presumably, the green one might have been her boyfriend. They both shivered as though they would prefer they hadn't been singled out so.

As the King went through and divided my sons's companions into groups, he then turned back to the. "**And as for you, children, you shall face your own parents, as it should be within the forests from here.**"

I felt something within my heart weep. I didn't want to face my children, not again.

My husband let out a grunt of affirmation and approval and I knew his appetite to fight was growing.

"That's alot of challenges!" declared my elder son.

"Yes... what about you? We desire a challenge with you!" Toothless barked, though I could feel him hesitating to speak, as much as I was hesitant to face them.

"**And you make a great claim," **replied my King. "**You ask for me to bestow my Kingdom in a challenge; if this is to be so, then do you have the sufficient counsel to rule? The wisdom, the leadership, the prowess? If you possess at least some of these in a sufficient quality, in either yourselves or in your allies, then I will personally fight you myselfâ€¦ Now, the rest of you Kin should leave your offerings and move to the sidelines.**"

Toothless grumbled, but the female Nadder from the bottom of the hill, Stormfly came and pulled him away.

Hiccup came slightly after them, speaking in probably some sort of reassurance. I think I caught the mention of time, about how much they would have.

The other Kin at the mountain base, the rest of my mate's former Flight scattered and laid their treasures and plunder at the base, opening barrels to dump their contents and hauling the whale carcass off somewhere to be cut into chunks. I did not expect them to go this far, to go through so much effort to draw the attention of not only the King, but of the Enclaves and of the commoners. This could all end bad.

"Do not worry, my love," spoke my mate. "Our children should survive the experience, we taught them much."

I frowned. Even as he was now, my mate was still my mate. And he knew me well, even having spent so long together. "You think so? You didn't teach our eldest much in the way of warfare."

The burning Nightmare let out a grimace. "Which I plan to fixâ€¦" he muttered. "But, after thisâ€¦ everything shall go back to the way they should be."

The way they should be! What _should _that be? I turned to my husband and looked into his burning eyes. Maybe, just maybe! "Maybe you're right," I spoke.

"Good," said my mate. "I think I have an idea of where the battle should take place."

We then flew down the hills. Several of the Kin there turned eyes towards my mate with fear looks. My mate had lost his Flight because I was unwilling to let him to challenge our two sons. Now they were all here, looking at us with nervous looks. I wondered if many of them would easily return to my husband's command.

Ahead of us, were the two we wanted to meet. "You've come!" I knew that I was going to see them again, that was promised to me. I only wish there were other ways than meeting like this.

Hiccup looked down towards the ground as if he didn't know what to say.

Toothless, the bolder of the two, did. "We have. And we're going to beat you."

My mate simply grunted. "We shall see. Shame we won't get to see the others fail in their challenges."

"Maybe if we defeat you fast enough," Hiccup mused, still watching on the ground.

I didn't want to fight my children, nor did I want my husband to fight them. But it is my King's decree that I fight them! however, there was one thing I could do. "What are you doing wearing that ridiculous thing?"

"For protection!" Hiccup reply wryly. I would have never thought my son would grow up to be so sarcastic.

I looked at Hiccup's armor! and wondered if it even deserved to be called such. "Your armor doesn't protect enough of your body. The gaps between joints are too large and there are enough exposed areas that any real foe could circumvent them when striking you."

"Oh, I don't know; I'm it'll protect my just fine," Hiccup insisted. What was he planning?

I shook my head and turned to my mate, who looked at us with mild amusement. "Let him learn the error of his ways. Kin do not need Herd things to guard themselves when scale is enough."

"Last I check, you felt different," said Toothless.

"And we're still going to beat you," said Hiccup, still sounding relatively lazy, even when supporting his brother.

My mate smirked. "Then, we shall do battle at the sound beaches." He turned to me. "I heard there was a scuffle between you and our boys before, was there not?"

I nodded. That was the place where I revealed to my youngest the

truth about himself. It seemed oddly fitting that it was there another battle between family members was carried out.

"Then we shall fight as soon as we arrive," he said.

I turned to the King, who was still setting up the other conflicts and challenges, speaking orders and insights to the other combatants. He didn't need to physically come with us, not when his senses stretched everywhere within his land.

We took flight and arrived above our destination before too long. But upon arrival, my mate blasted out a jet of searing flame at one of our sons.

Toothless ducked under it and did a quick roll. "Hey!"

"I told you we would fight as soon as we arrived; now fight!" roared my husband, diving down to engage Toothless. His wings lit aflame as the very power he wielded came to him.

Hiccup in response flew nearby his brother. With his foolish set of armor weighing him down, he was much slower than a Night Fury should ever be. Flying in that getup was going to tire him out, no doubt.

I hesitated, but I knew that I needed to fight, if for no other reason than to make sure my mate wouldn't be too upset I wasn't getting involved. I, being the pragmatic one, decided to take out the most vulnerable. Hiccup, unfortunately, had to be taken out of the air.

I lobbed a close range plasma blast at my eldest, causing him to get jerked off course by the mid air explosion detonating nearby him.

"Woah!" he blared and nearly avoided hitting a tree.

I didn't want to hurt my eldest, but I knew that taking him out quickly was the best way to handle this all. "You should withdraw from this contest." I demanded of my son.

But like the stubborn men of my family, he wouldn't listen. He hid under the canopy and behind the trees.

Toothless, taking advantage of his natural speed, was able to outfly and turn the tables around on my husband. But with Hiccup flying low and in the cover of the forest, I had to do something.

I went to my husband's aid and leveled another concussive blast right at my youngest's torso.

Toothless was knocked out and falling hard.

"Haha! Nice!" declared my mate, but I was suddenly feeling deeply regretful for that action.

I swooped in towards my youngest son and attempted to break his fall, keep him from hurting himself in the crash landing. I didn't want him to be a cripple for the rest of his life if he blowed his way through trees!

I flew beside him and tried to carry his body gently down to the ground, but his eyes opened in a flash. I suddenly found myself tumbling through the woods and spiralling out of control. With a half open eye spotting danger up ahead, I quickly righted myself and burst down a tree at its base, clearing a way for myself, free of obstacles.

"Mother!" snapped Toothless, sounding if I had to guess, embarrassed. He was flying by himself again, stable in the air, eyeing me with a nervous look.

My mate flew over me and chortled. "Do not let your compassion distract you!" he declared.

I sighed. So I can't even show concern for my own sons, can I? I know we're fighting now, but they and my husband were the only family I had left. I flapped my wings and took in a big gust of air, taking myself over the canopy and on the same altitude as my husband. "They fight us without hesitation this time!" I said.

"Which is good!" said my husband. "Now they have learned not to be so cowardly, well, one of them has..."

A blast of energy detonated right in front of us and my mate and I quickly darted out of the way, taking minimal damage, as we realized that we were forgetting something.

Hiccup was still underneath, hiding in the trees and using that to his advantage. He lobbed forth a more uses of his Breath, under the cover of shadow. Unfortunately for my eldest, Night Fury Breath was slightly slowed down by gravity, making his shots more easily avoidable by quick flying. And no amount of cover was going to hide him forever, especially not when his every attack was bright as the setting sun. "I see him!" I barked and went after him.

"Go ahead!" declared my mate. "Our youngest approaches!"

I turned my head for a brief moment to catch a look at my husband fight against our youngest and hoped that neither of them would be too badly hurt and dove.

Hiccup's choice of protection was a foolish one. His armor was still new, shiny enough that the glint of sunlight contrasted starkly against his dark scales that when coupled with his reduced speed, meant that I could easily fly circles around him. However, I wanted to make this battle quick and painless.

I took us down to earth with a hard tackle caused us both to land into the sandy border between beach and forest. The fall would have killed an ordinary human, but I knew what we were made of and what we were capable of surviving. Hiccup and I took a dusty hit and tumbled for a brief moment before we separated.

I rolled and tumbled and leapt onto my feet, recalling the trained reflexes I had honed.

Hiccup didn't have that advantage and had to pull his head out of the sand the old fashioned way.

"You've lost my son," I told him. "Now, submit before you hurt

yourself even more."

However, I knew he wasn't taking my offer seriously. He pretended to be in a thoughtful gesture. "Oh, that sounds really temptingâ€|" he said in a mock tone.

"Hiccup!" I snapped. "You shouldn't have doneâ€|" I struggled to find the right words and then just decided to lay a paw upside down, referencing him and his silly get up. "This."

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "That's all of me," he said.

I felt like slapping myself. "...Hiccup, I know you've come here to speak with our King, but going so far as to challenge him is ridiculous."

"Well, not as ridiculous as deciding to work for himâ€|"

"It's not about me!" I sighed. My eldest son doesn't understand, no one does. I've sacrificed so much and soon it'll all pay off in the end. I shook my head and decided to make a hard choice. I wasn't willing to hurt my child, nor was I willing to draw out this contest even longer.

I decided end it the quickest and most painless way available to me. I called upon the Gift that I had, the power to instill fear in the hearts of others. It was the Gift I had earned after countless Hunts and proved myself worthy as a Knight as much as I was a Viking in my old life. I felt an ice cold surge boiling my heart as I drew forth my power. "I am asking you one last time, surrender." I spoke, my voice almost tasted of bitter dust in my mouth. I was going to force my eldest to yield.

Hiccup shook his head, still denying. The power I had called wasn't at its peak, but I knew that soon he would give in. "Mother, Toothless and I are going to win. You're not stopping us."

I narrowed my eyes and focused intently at my own son. I didn't want to use this power against him, I didn't really like this power at all, because every time I did, the memory of my abandonment so many years ago came back fresh in my head. But I didn't want to hurt my child even more, my precious, brilliant boyâ€|" "I will," I declared.

Hiccup looked at me, still not wavering, his look almost growing more fierce instead of the desired effect. Something was wrong. "You can try," he dared.

My son was not afraid me, not breaking down and surrendering as I had hoped. It was curious. I was shrouded in the strongest covering of icy fear I could muster, thinking deeply of the same frozen winter and isolation that left me to hide underneath a rotting ship husk. And yet my son was not backing away. "What did you do?"

Hiccup only looked at me, almost feigning innocence. "Nothing," he claimed.

It then dawned on me that maybe that armor of his had a different purpose other than protecting him from physical harmâ€|" I was about to act upon that realization, but a flurry of sand covered my eyes

and I was suddenly blinded by the irritants. "Hiccup!" I roared. I cursed my paws for being so inflexible and incapable of clearing my face.

"Sorry, Mom!" he apologized before blasting me with his own Breath!

I swiped furiously against my brow, my eyes blurry from the irritation, but I could still see enough. "Get back here!"

But Hiccup darted off into the sky and rejoined the fighting going above.

My mate and my youngest did battle, as before. Toothless relying on his speed to evade my mate's burning power. In the previous battle back at Fort Sinister, Toothless and my son were forced to fight in close corridors on the ground, preventing them from utilizing the full extent of their speed. Here, in the open areas above the King's realm, this was not a problem beyond occasionally bumping into other observing Kin.

Toothless evaded another gout of flame at scorched the ground on the earth, but I could tell the strain of evading was starting to take its toll. He was slower, more fatigued, maybe from lack of practice with his wings. My mate though had plenty of stamina, enough to keep sending his Breath at our youngest. That was among the King's blessings to him, fire that would never end.

"Stop running!" shouted my husband. "You two always keep running!"

Toothless didn't respond and darted overhead, launched another blast as he reached his apex.

My mate braced himself with his wings and absorbed the blow and then retaliated with another use of his Breath. Toothless this time wasn't so fortunate and the column singed his wings, the sheer heat penetrating even through a Night Fury's flame retardant scale and with enough force that it could blast a Night Fury forward. I winced as I saw the younger soon being nearly thrown out of the sky again only to save himself from descent.

I shambled forward, taking a few cursory steps out of the sand and into the dirt and undergrowth. My son's surprise attack left me hurt, but in tact. I could recover and rejoin the fight. And my vision was still randomly blurring with water from the irritation. But I had to hurry.

My mate was about to blast Toothless out of the sky. Hiccup flown between them and caught the stream of flame before it could harm his brother. But unlike Toothless who was injured and pushed back by the heat and force, Hiccup dove through the burning line and rammed his father in the chest.

"What!? How?" he declared, righting himself upon reorienting himself.

Hiccup let out a little laugh. "Oh, just my latest project! And predictably, you don't like it one bit!"

Toothless joined in. "And now I regret not getting one for myself!"

What sorcery my son wielded, I had no idea. To think he was able to counter the Gifts the King had given us seemed almost unthinkable. Where did he get that kind of power?

It probably didn't matter. As much as I liked seeing my children being unharmed, this was bad news for my mate, my husband. Stoick needed me. I wanted to leap up into the air.

"Hey! Uh, you're Toothless's Mum, right?"

But before I could depart, I froze and did a quick look around; I wasn't alone. "Who's there?"

"Oh, just me!" chirped a voice that came from my left flank. One Kin appeared me, literally, she appeared in front of me from out of nothing. A reddish clad Changewing, one of those dragons that could blend into nothingness due to their special scales, approached.

"What do you want?" I barked, desperate for time. "Who are you?" The only reason that I was even giving this one any attention at all was because she knew my youngest son by name. That was important.

She laughed. "Oh, just a friend of your son, bit of an admirer, really."

I blinked. So it was of my son's friends. Maybe it was that Bog Burglar who said she wanted to be a Changewing.

"Stay back, you know if the King catches you interfering you'd be disqualifying your friends!" Which admittedly, I wanted because it meant that my sons, even if they defeated us wouldn't be able to face the King.

"Well, I'm not helping them out, " she said with utter certainty and disrespect for authority. "Besides, I'm here to deliver something Astrid wanted you to have. And you know how he gets about honoring agreements."

I narrowed my eyes. She knew Hiccup's girlfriend, the warrior girl, Nadder, and now currently Flight Commander. "She put you up to this?"

The Changewing nodded. "Well, you said, you'd appreciate it if she'd come."

"...and speak a case to the King for diplomacy on this most Glorious day," I countered. "I maybe hoped she would bring my sons to speak but never did I imagine you would all incite rebellion or Usurp our Lord!"

The Changewing nodded. "Well, neither of them think quite like a sane person, but that's why we like 'em!" She then put something on the ground near me a single silvery arrow. "I think you know what these'll do."

I nodded. Yes, Hiccup told me about these and their purpose once

before, they had effects against magic, spellcraft. I still don't like them because of what they nearly did to my eldest. "What am I supposed to do with these!?" I just looked at the Changewing.

The female Kin simply tried to look nonchallant. "Oh, I think you know," and then she turned her back towards me and faded away.

I took the arrow in my paw and wondered what I was supposed to do? Pin Hiccup and Toothless, thus causing them to lose due to inability to fight? No, Astrid most certainly wouldn't give me a weapon to defeat her potential mate. did she mean for me to use them against my mate? Would they even work on him? Maybe, I knew.

With some difficulty, I took the arrows both into a paw and then flew up into the sky.

The battle above had turned against my mate in a big way. He was outnumbered and one of his foes was resistant to his Breath attacks. Perhaps the only reason he was still flying was because of his great stamina.

As I approached both of my sons broke off from engaging their father.

"Dead Wings! What took you so long?" he snapped.

"Thinking," I said. "The terrain does not favor us. They are too nimble. We must regroup elsewhere, preferably where that agility would work against them"

My mate nodded. "Very well. What did you have in mind?"

"The seastacks!" I declared. "They are tall enough to provide cover and should they try to take full advantage of their speed, they would have to slow down to avoid collisions!"

My mate seemed to accept this, possibly not having the fight in him to argue when I was still in better fighting condition. "Yes, the wise warrior takes advantage of terrain when able."

We both then flown in the direction of the sea stacks, off the island...and away from the immediate presence of the King. Both of our sons followed us, slower from fatigue, but still clearly willing to fight.

They might have been curious as to why we were making this withdrawal, moving away from the horde of spectators and the rest of the island.

"Where are you going?" asked Toothless. "I thought we were supposed to fight!"

"We are," declared my husband. "Just a simple change of- ack!"

I really didn't know what I was doing when I shoved my shoulder right into my mate's side.

He grunted and howled in frustration as pushed him right into the a nearby seastack. "What are you doing?"

My body burned, the heat that my mate wielded was like a roaring inferno I dared not approach even to me in this form.

"Mother!" both of my children cried from behind. They were concerned, wondering what this betrayal was about.

â€¦ I did too.

Stoick was injured and weak, but he was still bigger and thus stronger than meâ€¦ but I'll never admit that to him. "Head back!" I shouted at them. "Return to the King and tell him you won!"

"But Momâ€¦" Hiccup protested. "He'll know."

"This." Stoick tried to struggle, trying to free his face from the rock. Fire jutted out and his body was beginning to melt stone into sand. "Fight isn't over!" he snarled.

"That we are unable to fight," I corrected my son. "Now, leave!"

I turned one last look towards Toothless and saw an unreadable expression. He hoveled in place and then twisted his body backwards. "Hiccup, we've got to save our strength. We have to go..."

"But, what about them?" Hiccup asked. "We can't leave them."

"You can," I spoke. My husband attempted to break free and thrashed his head, but I kept him pinned down.

I saw my sons depart from us, just as the last of my strength faded and the heat from Stoick grew to a burning point.

"Why did are you doing this? Why do you betray your own mate!" questioned my husband.

In all my years of service to the King. I always wondered if maybe the sacrifices and compromises I made betrayed my own identity. I wasn't a dragon. Maybe this was the first time I was actually standing by him.

I took the arrow, still firmly in my paw and struck it deep into Stoick's flesh. The burning heat of his Gift shattered, only to be replaced by another fire that consumed his body. He shrieked and cursed and then slowly fell limp. My pushing against him stopped, my husband growing smaller, weakerâ€¦ human as the fire slowly melted him away.

I took him into my forelegs and carried him off to safety, the fire working its way into consuming me. I felt weaker, too. I quickly spotted a place for us to lay down and used the last of my ability to fly to take us thereâ€¦ By holding my husband so close to me, I think whatever power undid the curse upon him also applied to me.

"**I wish I could say that I am surprised," **I heard the King speak. His voice was weaker, barely a whisper.

I tried to speak, but my mouth felt hotâ€¦ I wondered if that would even matter. I am barely a Night Fury anymore.

"**Once again, I am betrayed by my own," **he continued. "**I am left

wondering if I waste my time by choosing to believe that a select few Kin are above deceit." **

I wanted to speak to the great ancient, speak to him. To tell him why, my reason; that ultimately, I could no longer accept what he had in store for me. I couldn't be his servant, not when it meant just throwing away everything else.

The elder's voice continued to fade away to nothing, only the faintest of it I could hear in my own head. **"Regardless of your intentsâ€| the only fitting punishment for youâ€| is to let them face meâ€|"**

And then he was gone. I wondered if maybe this was the right choice, that by conceding to stop ourselves from fighting our children, I only delivered them into something far worseâ€| I tried not to think about it.

Stoick and I landed on a large rock, smoothened by the battering waves. The last of our changes completed, leaving us exposed and vulnerable.

"Valâ€|" he wheezed, green eyes looking at me.

"It's okay, we're hereâ€| together," I breathed, looming over him. This was my husband, I knew it deep down in my heart.

He groaned and tried to get up, but now he was only human. And as strong and bold of a man he was, he wasn't invincible. "We're only going to turn back, you knowâ€|." he managed to say.

I nodded. I knew. I could almost feel my wings reemerging from my back. But that didn't matter to me. "But now, we're together. That makes all the difference in the world."

64. Chapter 64

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â€| I hated being a winner. I was stuck between facing a terrible monster and not knowing something I desperately needed to know. And the worst of this all was I didn't feel ready for what lied ahead.

Hiccup and I waited anxiously at the base of the great hill, surrounded by the dragons that served under us. Questions were raised, but answers were sparse. "What happened back there?" I asked him. Surely, the craftier of the two of us must have had something planned. "Why did weâ€| win? Did you say anything to cause her to turn?"

Hiccup could only shrug, causing me endless frustration. "Iâ€| don't think I did."

"You didn't?" I beamed. Then what was all of that? Why did our mother such tackle our father away andâ€| basically hand us the victory by disqualifying herself? It made no senseâ€|. I frowned and looked at my feet and moped. So much for being a big, strong Night Fury. And to

think few months ago, I probably might have seen this outcome
idealâ€| "I hope Mom's okay."

Hiccup nodded in reply. "And Dad."

"Well, I'm not worried one bit," said a voice from behind. Camicazi the Changewing came into sight. For some reason, Astrid didn't take her with her, probably because she didn't want the extra stealth. "Oh, I'm sure they'll make it out just fine; it's the others you got to be worried about," she said, her tone not carrying her usual cheer.

Hiccup and I turned, clenching our teeth. Right, the others still hadn't made it back; they were still stuck in their challenges. Well, Fishlegs and Meatlug were probably off on a singing contest with the other bards and lore keepers. But as for the others, I felt rather afraid for what kind of danger the Terror posed to them. He was a Knight for a reason.

Even worse, time was still ticking. How much time did we have left to wait? Was the Red Death going to simply have us fail to face him and he would be free to utterly crush us? Then again, did he really need to wait so? He could literally step on us.

"Iâ€| hope Astrid's alrightâ€|" muttered Hiccup.

I thought about Stormfly. She was with Astrid, too. They would share the same fate. "Yeahâ€| Stormfly and some of the others are with her."

Camicazi's draconic muzzle pulled into a frown, though I felt like I didn't understand why. "Sheâ€| they'll be okay. They're strong, you wait."

That didn't reassure us as much as it could have. I didn't like the idea of letting them face a foe we had no idea about. That Terror might well be carving his way through them, cutting them down and worse. Who knew? Maybe those gods Hiccup liked to pray to in times of trouble.

Hiccup slowly nodded and turned his head over to me. "I've recovered from the fight against Mom, you holding up okay, Toothless?" he said, almost sounding a little ashamed. He didn't take much of a beating and most of his hurting probably came from how his armor chafed against his scales rather than getting hit by anything.

I nodded back. I took a few hits here and there and unlike my brother, those didn't heal easily, but they didn't matter as far as I was concerned. So what if maybe I had lost a little blood or had some burn marks that dragons rarely got from all but the most intense flames? I wanted to fight, I wanted to win everything back; I didn't care about it.

"**Step forward,**" spoke a booming thunder.

Hiccup and I turned up towards the Red Death, his head rising to meet the peak of the hill. We both then turn our gazes toward each other and had a silent conversation in the span of a blink of an eye.

None of our friends were back yet, which was a bad omen as far as we

were concerned. What if... ?

"Uh, maybe he just wants to talk to you," Camicazi suggested.

We both turned to her and really wished that to be the case. What if maybe the Red Death did want to parley? He was a monster, not doubt, but maybe I am wrong...

"Uh, our Lord shouldn't be kept waiting. No Kin delays, yes?" said a dragon nearby. She was one of our a Nadder, named Bittersap due to her mostly yellow, amber like coloration.

"He's not our Lord," I reminded, just as much for her sake as it was for mine. The Red Death didn't deserve it. He took my parents away and is tormenting us with these ridiculous challenges instead of facing us outright.

The Nadder backed away and bowed politely before leaving to join the rest of our members.

"In fact, he's hardly anyone's Lord anymore, ain't his allies in a revolt? What gives?" muttered Camicazi. "Has he gone senile or something?"

"Maybe," Hiccup agreed. "But we're going to need to see him sooner eventually either way. Better we do it sooner."

I grimaced, but accept that. Hiccup and I had to make our way to this battle before he gained his full power.

We both moved up the incline until we were at the peak and came face to face with a dozen eyes. "You took long enough," he murmured.

"We can do what we want with our time," I snapped.

The great beast snarled before me. "We all run out of time, child. This is the truth."

I held firm, holding on to a conviction that I had, that I didn't really understand where it came from. I don't know, but did that matter? I looked at my enemy in his multiple eyes, let him know that I wasn't here to be his friend.

Hiccup wasn't nearly as intense and simply spoke. "Is it time yet? Are we to fight now?"

The King's massive maw moved like a cliff cleaving itself from the ground. **"Yes! we shall begin momentarily."**

I blinked, my fury broken. Strange how that worked. I was itching and ready for a fight and the moment it's about to begin, I lose that edge. I wanted to fight him, take back the things he stole, and have him! I don't know, sent to the far corners of the world. "Wait, but what about the others?"

The King's multiple pairs of eyes narrowed on me again.** "I will not tell you the Fate of your other Kindred, I do not believe you need to know such things."**

I felt the blood drain from my legs. This monster was toying with us,

no doubt. He was maybe telling us a lie orâ€¦ I did not want to know the truth. I just wanted to claw at something, preferably him. It. "Then what are we waiting for?" I dared myself to maintain calm, composed.

But the air around us shifted, changed, as if a lightning storm was about to fill the sky above, yet nothing said that there would be rain or thunder.

"Toothlessâ€¦" my brother spoke.

"_**I **_**cannot truly fight you directly yet, but I can do so indirectlyâ€¦" ** spoke the monster.

"Explain!" I barked. Was he attempting to delay us even further? No, waitâ€¦.

From out of the air ahead of us a figure slowly materialized between us and the Red Death. A man stepped forward, being made from the air from the bones, to flesh, to skin, to clothesâ€¦ I shivered at the display, wondering what that was about.

He was dressed in fine clothes with brown hair and a finely trimmed beard. He was nothing like the Viking Chiefs I knew, he was tooâ€¦ regal. His tunic was a neat and finely trimmed piece of attire that reached down to his knees. Did he even have trousers? And his boots were tooâ€¦ exposed, why would anyone deliberately wear footwear that revealed the toes. They looked more like straps than anything else. **"You put too much love into the form the Herd possess," **spoke the manâ€¦ at the same time as the Red Death, both in the tongue of dragons.

I blinked and then turned towardsâ€¦ the Red Death and wonderedâ€¦ he, this man before me, was he also the King?

"**I will destroy you with this form that you cherish so," **spoke the two of them again. **"And show you the error of going against your Kin." **

Everyone, my brother, the Flightm, the other dragons around us looked at the King'sâ€¦ second body with bewilderment. It was unreal to think that anyone could be in two places at once, or that the King could do such a thing. Thisâ€¦ had to be some sort of power the King possessed.

The regal lookingâ€¦ king stepped forward and brandished a blacksword, the metal forming a wavy pattern in the metal. He examined the blade, showing us a grin, looking pleased satisfied with himself. He then directed the blade towards us in a challenge. **"Ready yourself!" **

Hiccup and I didn't have much time to think about this turn of events any further before we suddenly found ourselves fleeing from a charge as he swept his sword into a downward slice right as he passed the space we occupied a split second ago. Common sense and quick thinking working together pretty much told us to go take off and avoid the man and strike at him on the ground, so we darted into the sky. I doubted I cared about honor or chivalry anymore, and my brother never had either of those things.

Once, I was sure we were a dozen or so feet in the air, I went to look down to prepare a Breath barrage, but before I could, I saw him rocketing into my field of view. I tumbled in the air as strong hands grappled my limbs and tried to wrest control of my body.

"Thought you could get away that easily?" taunted the warrior.

We hurled and tumbled in the air, our stability and balance nonexistent as we thrashed. Whatever he was, this one, the king was strong and winning the struggle. If we stayed like that for far too long, we could crash.

But fortunately, I didn't need to be strong to beat him. Hiccup from out of nowhere tackled us to break our grip on the other, causing the man to break free and hurtle to earth.

"Thanks!" I shouted.

"No problem!"

I turned towards the human combatant as he almost landed into a sea of dragons. Each of them scattered, not wanting to get involved, but also not wanting to interfere in a fight that could decide the fate of everything in the Kingdom. But where I expected the king to break, the ground broke instead. With an almost jaw dropping control of his own fall, the King landed onto his feet, the earth below him breaking and cracking as through whatever damage falling would have done to the human body was instead being transferred to the environment itself.

"That is so unfair," Hiccup complained.

I was probably having my jaw drop, because I couldn't speak.

The king below greeted us with a smile and a laugh and then leapt up into the sky yet again, as if he was some sort of human frog.

This time, I dodged out of the way, not wanting to get hit by the same move twice, causing him to land back on earth, still amused.

"We got to go higher!" I said.

Hiccup nodded and then we went to an incline up, going high enough where his jumps couldn't reach us and where we could still get good odds of retaliating. We then opened up with an initial volley, focusing our Breath onto the area around the king and covering the place with clouds of dust.

"Amusing," boomed the voice of the real Red Death.

The king below darted from the dust cloud and then tossed his blade into the sky, hard and fast, straight and true.

Hiccup and I had plenty of time to evade the thing and the speeding black blade zipped past us like some sort of blur. I was going to go focus on defeating the warrior on the ground with another volley of Breath, but Hiccup's declaration's told me other wise, "Uh, Toothless? It's coming right around!"

I immediately angled my wings the other way and attempted to reverse, just in time to notice the black sword come within a hair's breadth of my face. And then impossibly, the thing twisted mid air, redirected its blade and pointing itself right at me again. I quickly abandoned any thoughts about engaging the king below, because if I did that, the sword would cut me into pieces before I could land my attack! I zipped in the sky, the sword pursuing me, sword point right behind us. "Go after him!" I shouted, trying to focus on avoiding the blade and then watching what happened that wasn't about me. "Take him down!"

Hiccup dived downward and attempted to grab the warrior's attention. "Hey, big ugly. Pick on someone your own size!"

The king bellowed with a laugh. "Really now?" he then bent down and picked up a stone, hurling it at my brother.

Hiccup, not having as much mobility as me in that armor of his, was hit by a single stone and nearly knocked out of the sky.

"Such simple protections. A defense against spellcraft, but not one against physical forces!" declared the king below. He picked up more stones and pummeled my brother with a barrage of rocks that reached him even as high up as he was. My brother kept getting pelted and was being slowly knocked out the sky, the stones denting his armor.

I couldn't let this happen.

I swooped downward, flying sword chasing right after me, the king below focused in trying to force Hiccup to the ground with his stones. That left me with an opening. I flew through a crowd of dragons, that scattered ahead of my wake. The sword followed behind me.

I drew in my Breath and launched in a quick shot. The warrior fell to his side by my attack, but quickly recovered and rose to his feet, but that was enough to buy Hiccup some time to recover. I knew I couldn't engage him up close, not with the strength he displayed so far; I swerved to the side and tried to climb, to get out of the way.

But suddenly, I felt a strong tug around my tail. "Going somewhere?" shouted a voice. I had just enough time to regret making that move before I found myself slammed into the earth with a hard thud.

I blinked my eyes open to gaze upon the man ahead of me. He raised his right hand and caught the black sword as it flown over his head. He brought the sword point down over to where my tail was. I shivered, frozen and afraid, looking at the frigid look within his eyes. Was he going to cut my tail off, to wound me so? Could I escape? Could I beat this monster of a man?

"And to think I had such high hopes for you," he barred. He slowly pointed the sword higher upon my body, going above my nethers, my abdomen, my chest, my neck. Each time, I felt like he was planning on cutting something out, something very important to living, the severity only rose from there. The sword rose until at my face, with his own gaze hove over my head. "You could have been so much moreâ€¦"

I didn't speak, I didn't move I knew that I could die here and now at his command. I have never been so afraid to die, not since I was a child, but now there was nowhere to run.

"Iâ€¦ would not normally do this, but I believe I must teach you a lesson..." The king bent downward and reached towards the top of my head. I didn't know what happened until it was too late. A crimson blaze erupted over the spot to where the King touched me, the fire painless and almost insubstantial. But while I was unharmed by the flames, something else wasn't. My cloak, the very thing that had let me try my luck at being a dragon had burst, leaving me just a boy against a man that was in every way more powerful than my father could be.

I quickly took off my cloak, just in time to see it go up in flames and turn into ash in my hands. "Howâ€¦? Whatâ€¦?" The last time that happened to me, Alvin took an enchanted arrow and struck me, damaging the cloak. This time, the entire thing, the only keepsake that I had that belonged from a grandfather I never met... was simply gone.

The King looked down at me, his gaze narrowing. "Child, I did not want to do that, but I must have ensured you would not contest my rule any longerâ€¦ You are currently Kin no more and thus no longer subject to Law. Please, surrender yourself before-

"Toothless!" I heard. In a split second, everything happened all so fast.

The King was knocked off of his feet.

I was taken into the air, held aloft my two paws grabbing onto my shoulders.

"Hiccup?" I questioned.

My brother turned his gaze towards me, looking down as I looked up at him. He nodded. "You better get on. You have to get out of hereâ€¦ you got the thing?"

I blinked trying to remember. "The sword?" I asked, quizzically.

"Noâ€¦ the other thing?"

Uhâ€¦ what other thing?" It seems to have slipped my mind.

Hiccup grumbled in frustration and rolled tossing me into the air, causing me to land on his back when the twirl was done. "Never mind. Justâ€¦ we have to keep fighting, some howâ€¦"

"And how are we supposed to beat him?" I barked, my voice still trembled. I was so close to being killed "You-you saw that. Right? He's got power, lots of it"

"Maybeâ€¦ but we can stillâ€¦"

And then suddenly I just realized a shadow looming over us. I turned just in time to see a _tree_, roots still fresh with dirt coming right down ontop of us. "Hiccup, swerve!" I shouted and pushed my brother's left wing downward, forcing him to tilt to the left,

evading the tree by a narrow miss.

"Okay, this is starting to get really ridiculous." Hiccup complained.

"I told you!" I said. I regret going into this challenge, butâ€¦ without the threat of a sword cutting me open, I think I could muster enough courage to keep fightingâ€¦ even like this. I still had a crossbow and that sword, but using them up here wasn't going to be ideal.

I turned my gaze backwards. We seemed to be flying over the island's forest, which explains where the trees have come fromâ€¦. and it slowly dawned on me that this was a bad sign.

I was proven right when another tree was being flung right at us, the trajectory clearly intending to go where we were. I tapped my brother on the back and told him what I wanted him to do. "We might want to run nowâ€¦"

Hiccup responded by increasing his speed in attempt to outspeed the comingâ€¦ trees. I am still trying to believe what was happening? Was the King pulling them out of the ground and then hurling them? Or commanding him with his powers or something?

But one thing was for sure, the King wasn't quite satisfied with throwing one. As the second tree failed to hit us due to us outrunning the thing, more came, this time getting hurled faster at a much quicker rate than the first two. Again and again, trees were pulled out of the ground and being flung right at us!

"Oh great..." I murmured. "More incoming!"

Hiccup took evasive actions, taking quick looks from behind and then shifting his position to avoid incoming attacks, only to have to change again to make up for more being flung to try to keep us on our toes.

As Hiccup kept on the evasive, I decided to try something risky, especially since as I wasn't hanging on, I might end up falling as a result of being knocked off. I pulled out my crossbow and kept doing a quick scan, trying to find the King below. There was a path through the forest where the trees were obviously coming from and it was gaining on us. But I couldn't see the King, the forest was just too thick.

I focused in, looking through my weapon's crosshair, scanning for a target, yet I couldn't find any. The path of trees wasn't advancing either, no more trees were being uprooted and thrown at our direction. Why was that?

I put my crossbow down and turned my gaze at the still rapidly advancing trees. Nothing's hit us yet, especially since more than a few of them just keep crashing into themselves and Hiccup has been evading the rest. But as my gaze slowly rose, I suddenly realized there was a figure that was jumping from one tree to the next.

"Hiccup!" I screamed, trying to warn my brother. I quickly raised my crossbow, but it wasn't fast enough. The King came right down onto

of us, sword raised over his head, his voice raised in a howl.

I pulled the trigger. I shot him.

He still cut swung his sword, cutting Hiccup's wing, severing the membrane and causing blood to spill out from the cut.

We fell out the sky, my brother's balance lost and unable to be reestablished with only a single wing. He began to spiral out of control. I tossed aside my crossbow and tried to grab hold before I got separated from my brother. "Hiccup!" I screamed.

"Toothless!" he called out.

And he grabbed onto me, trying to slow down our fall with his barely nonfunctional wings.

I couldn't see the King, the warrior having disappeared from sight.

Brother crashed through trees, his fall slowing down as he hit each branch, but each hit was brutal on his body, I could feel it even as he absorbed the blows. But one last final impact landed us on soft ground, mud and silt that would absorb a fall. My brother let go of me at last and I tried to stand.

I felt queasy, everything spinning. I knew I only survived because our fall wasn't going at terminal velocity and my brother absorbed most of the beating that caused us to slow down— at least, that's what I think happened. Maybe it was because I was made of cheese and had potatoes on my olives...

I fell beside him, in the mud, defeated.

I was kicked over by an outside force, I was too weak to resist.

The King above lifted his blackened blade and hung it over me. His look was unreadable, my vision of him blurry. He was too strong, too powerful— Did we even have a chance?

The sword glinted and he lift his blade over to another. Hiccup tried to stumble onto his feet, causing splashes of mud to scatter all over. "I know you can mend yourself from most injuries," said the warrior. "I know I don't need to hold back as much as I would. Surrender."

I could hear my brother groaning with complaint as he tried to flip himself over.

The King put a stop to that by kicking at his side, knocking the much larger Night Fury a few feet away with little effort. "You are only making this harder for all of us. Listen to reason..."

My brother let out a chuckle as he rolled onto his belly. "Yeah, about that— never really— good at listening. Ask my father."

The King let out a frustrated grunt. "No one in your bloodline ever did—" mused the warrior.

My— everything ached but I slowly got a hold of myself. If my

brother could still resist, even if it was just by about making quick comebacks, maybe I could muster up something too. If only my hands didn't feel so numb. My legs though felt a little better.

"Which part of it?" Hiccup asked.

The King replied in something unintelligible, another language, I think. "It bears not stating at this time," he spoke. "Surrender. This challenge is over. You've lost."

Hiccup tried to stand, but even without the King's help to knock him down, he kept sliding in the mud.

The King didn't seem bothered by the slippery ground, perhaps having the same disregard for it as he did for human limitations. Instead, he could only look at my brother with frustration. He bent over and grabbed him by the shoulder. "This construct defended you against a small sample of the power I granted to others, however, it is very useless against me." He punched Hiccup down into the ground, the attack sending my brother a few dozen feet away and causing his breastplate to break like glass

I swung my sword in a wide arc and slashed at his arms and he blocked it with a simple raising of his sword.

He spun on the balls of his feet and turned himself around in one clean motion. The blood drained from my face for a moment. "Do you really have so little honor?"

"No!" I squeaked. But as I said, a moment. "We're still fighting, remember?"

The King didn't look amused and was about to ask a question before he ended up taking a dive into the mud as well. So maybe he was expecting he was expecting me to get a sneak attack in, but apparently he didn't expect Hiccup to make such a hasty move.

"Get on!" my brother called and pointed his towards a way out.

But no. I shook my head. "We have to stay and fight!" I argued. I was tired of running. We ran too much as it was and I doubted we'd get far. Neither of us could fly any more. I was limited to the ground now that my cloak was destroyed and Hiccup's wing was still too torn for any real flying.

Hiccup hesitated, but as the King rose, he knew I spoke the truth. He stopped flee and stood right by me, cautious.

I just really hoped this plan wasn't a suicide move. I mean, the man's sword was clearly magical and I was very sure he was ridiculously strong.

The King rose from the earth and then dashed in our direction angle, striking the mud and sending forth a scattering wave around him.

I charged, being the brave fool that I was and swung it wide.

The black blade however dug through the dirt it was still with in scattered a wave of dirt in my direction, blinding me. Said sword then blocked my blow causing me to jump back from the recoil. And

then the larger warrior swung his blade in turn. I had to make a hasty defense, one that I barely parried in time.

Unlike a sword I still wish I had, this one didn't make me more skilled. In fact, I was sure the only reason I was even parrying the man right now, despite his massive strength advantages, was because he was letting me. This was only made worse by these statements. "Your form is sloppy, you over commit to your attacks and you only just barely learned how to defend yourself. You are outclassed."

Hiccup rose from behind and pelted him from behind with one of his plasma blasts. The King in response struck it with his sword and the thing discharged a few feet away, safely where it could do not damage to him.

I took the opportunity to lunge in, a desperate play, but we were losing. This time, the King couldn't respond in time, the blade struck through his torso and.. and... He turned to me.

My blood turned ice cold again. I tried to yank the blade out from him but I lacked the strength. I was hoping for something more to happen, yet it didn't. Why? What was going on? I felt myself being picked up by my neck, the King's massive hands constricting my breathing for a short lived time. Then, I was thrown through the air like I was nothing but a stone to him. I landed second later, aware that I was now covered in dragon

"Got another brilliant plan?" groaned by brother as he tried to push me off of him.

I picked myself up, just in time to see the King advancing forward. He pulled out the blade stuck in his guys and then tossed it aside with no comment. "I will say this again. You only hurt yourselves by continuing," spoke the warrior. He didn't even seem all that tired.

I internally howled with frustration. Maybe if we were both more experienced fighters and prepared this battle more thoroughly, we could have taken the victory but. the King was just too strong in pretty much every field. We were expecting him to fight in his true form, not conjuring up a warrior made out of gas to do battle with! We could have flown circles around him then! It certainly didn't help that this magical sword my brother encouraged me to build was a dud. Why wouldn't it work? Why?

I turned to my brother and wanted to get his opinion. His expression was unreadable, but I think he was thinking about something.

"So what's stopping you from killing us?" he spoke.

The King eyed him. "You do not need to know."

I didn't know what my brother was thinking, but I followed his lead. "Well it's about us, isn't it? I mean why do we have to surrender to you? I mean, it's frowned upon to slay a foe in a challenge, but why bother keeping us around?"

"You've gone out of your way a few times to make sure we were still alive," Hiccup spoke. "Like when you had Astrid do that deal of

wayback. You didn't get anything out of it for yourself, not that I knew anyways. Not a spy, not an informant, nothing!"

The King's eyes narrowed into slits as well. "You would never understand," spoke the warrior. "But I you are correct, I will not kill either of youâ€¦ not that I need to?"

"No!" hissed a voice.

We weren't alone anymore. Someone else was here. "Who- who was that?" I wish I had a weapon on me right now, because now I wish I wasn't so naked and stripped of defenses.

"Kill them, kill them now!" hissed the voice again. "They deserve it. It wasn't too big, not too loud. It was a dragon voice, though the tone wasâ€¦ odd. I don't recall hearing anything quite like it before.

"I do not know you," spoke the King, directing his sword towards thick bushes, as though he knew what was behind them. "Who are you?"

Out from the bushes came a creature, its skin nearly transparent to the point I could see its glowing insides and held piercing red eyes. It wasn't human that much I could tell. "A monsterâ€¦" spoke the returned Alvin.

65. Chapter 65

****Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

A long time ago, Toothless said that he defeated Alvin by blasting him with his own spear, one of the pieces that made up Gram. We haven't seen him since and for the most part, we were wondering what ever happened to him. Now I know.

Piercing red eyes looked right at me, demanding for my death in a way that could only be conveyed without words. A dragon, far larger than me stepped forward, a creature that was more horror than anything of this world. Alvin's skin and flesh were almost spectral, like they were barely not even there, exposing glowing red blood for all to see. He wore nothing to hide it, his body resembling something like a twisted Nadder, but with forearms in addition wings. Those talons in his hands were all practically sword-like in all the ways that mattered, long, sharp, almost metallic, and ready to kill. Even his legs and tail were ready to kill, decked out in spikes. And it went without saying who he wanted to put thereâ€¦

The King rose and stood between me and the newcomer, sword raised up in the direction of the Exterminator, the name Fishlegs gave that unseen species. "I refuse, stranger. I will not slay them."

"Then let me kill them," he demanded, not even stopping to take note of the fact a human was replying to him. Then again, maybe Alvin saw the fight and decided he was a god; probably not far off from the truth at this point. He was about to approach but a quick change of posture and an angling of the sword forward warded him away.

The warrior spoke. "Stranger; I do not know your affairs, but these two are under _my _jurisdiction."

Alvin let out a hungry snarl, a threat.

Toothless fell to the ground next to me, equal parts afraid and wanting to get a word with me. "Hiccup... He doesn't know Alvin?" he exclaimed. "But I thoughtâ€¦ I thought he was the Usurper."

I nodded to my brother. A long time ago, we thought that One Eye's Flight was sent to dispose of Alvin since he was causing problems to the dragonsâ€¦ yet the King referred to him as a stranger. "Maybe he doesn't realize he's changed since thenâ€¦" I also wonder if through our connection, the King was learning something about the newcomer, see if we knew anything.

"Maybe you're right," Toothless replied. He then turned to the coming fight. "What should we do?"

"We figure what's going on first." And hopefully run with our lives. "You have the escape plan?"

"Escape plan?" Toothless asked.

Really? Had Toothless forgot something so important? "Did you forget when you nearly drowned!?"

The warrior's grip on his blade loosened a little, as he slowly put it onto his side. "Listen, I am not your enemy here. All Kin are welcome in my realm, but all must obey my rule."

Alvin snorted flame, red eyes burning. He examined the King with an obvious look of contempt. He then turned to look at me, murder in his eyes. I shied away, kicking myself through the mud. I was exhausted, I still hadn't recovered my strength and I was still hurting from having my brother thrown into my chest.

The King's head turned towards me in consideration and then back at Alvin. "I notice you wish to do harm to these ones. I warn you, do not make an enemy of-"

But before he could finished speaking, Alvin lunged, sword-like talons being brought down upon the warrior's head. A clash of steel against hardened bone rattled the air, the warrior defending with a raised black sword in a blink, eyes locked. Alvin snarled, the larger creature's claws holding the blade by its grip like they were pinching it. "I do not care! I have come too far to turn back now!" He raised his other hand and swiped.

The King narrowed his eyes in disgust and broke his sword free, taking a stab into Alvin's wrist as he parried away the new strike. "You are a fool!" he declared. "You dare try to strike me down!"

"You're in my way!" Alvin, wounded, still pressed on with the attack. He drove the warrior back with every swipe, not even caring about getting nicked every time. It seemed so strange, that the King, the warrior that could rip trees from the ground was being pushed back so easily: what was he doing?

Alvin drove on more swipe, causing the warrior-king to be knocked aside, but that wasn't what he really wanted. He leapt up into the air, heavy claws pointing downward, screaming as a feral beast finding suitable prey would.

Toothless and I scattered before it was too late, Alvin landing in the space we occupied, breaking the earth. I didn't trust my armor to stand up to him.

He snarled, looking at me and my brother, each of us to his left and to his right. Hatred seethed out of his every word. "You did this to me!"

Oh sure, like I was the one who wanted to start turning everyone into dragons in the first place! "It's your own fault!" If he hadn't stolen that stupid potion all those months ago, maybe things would have been so much better. Although maybe Toothless could have skipped blasting him with his own cursed spear...

Alvin roared like a ravenous lion and then charge. Another quick evasion kept me from losing my head as Alvin drove his claws into a nearby boulder. I really have to stop taunting my enemies.

I responded with a quick burst of fire that stunned my foe for a quick second before I shambled and crashed as far away as I could.

He growled and attempted to pull himself free from the rock, grunting as the stone refused to give way. I hoped he would have been stuck like that for a moment longer, but a quick smash on the stone cracked deep fissures and broke him free. His eyes turned back to me, a hunger for blood clear on his face.

I felt my face grow cold as I quickly realized I was running out of options. Toothless was trying to pull something from out of the mud, maybe a weapon he could use, leaving Alvin's attention all directly on meâ€|

"You were the start of all thisâ€|" he growled. "It's because of you, I have lost everythingâ€|"

I backed away, afraid, yet still trying to piece together what was going on. What was Alvin talking about? Last I checked, he saw this new state as a sort of blessing since it made him much more powerful than before. Did something change? I had to knowâ€| and maybe, just maybe Alvin would waste time best spent on killing me. "Hey! You took something that wasn't meant for you!"

He growled. He probably didn't care about the "little" details. "You were the one who doomed me, turning me into a monster."

"Your reasons do not matter," said a voice from behind Alvin.

The Exterminator turned his head backwards, agitated that a foe would come to challenge him. That left him open to an attack, not by a sword, but by tree. The King swung a massive evergreen like it was a bat, knocking Alvin several dozen meters away into a pine that shattered on impact.

I could only stare in amazement. Did the King really protect me?

The warrior tossed the battered tree in his hands away, approaching the fallen pine with a sword in hand.

Alvin however, wasn't down for the count. He forced himself out of the rubble as a shambling mess of blood and exposed wounds that were quickly mending themselves. The dragon growled, his posture uneven and off balance as he began to recover. "It'll take more than that to kill me!" he dared.

"That can be arranged," spoke the King. He charged, sword raised high and lowered in a quick swing. Alvin retaliated by catching the blade once again and blew out a gust of flame that engulfed the King's human form.

He staggered and fell away from the dragon that burned him, gritting his teeth, but not screaming or yelling, like he was angry more than anything.

Alvin rose behind him, tossing the blade away and walking over to the King, hoping to finish what he started. He raised bladed talons brought them down to strike at his opponent's back.

But the King apparently saw it come. The flames that covered him all dispersed in a flash as though he willed them away. His blade came to his hand, drawn from its fall and into his hands with a quick motion. He spun his body around, quick and flawless, striking at Alvin's side, cutting into his abdomen.

The Exterminator groaned and was brought low, struggling to breathe a flame, but was choking on his blood.

The King simply looked into the beast's eyes, fearless and waiting for him to die.

It did not come. Alvin stepped ever forward, running the dark sword every deeper through him and swiped at the King's offending hands, forcing the warrior to break away his grip and jump back a couple feet.

Alvin pulled the blade from his body, groaning with effort and hurt as it left him, leaving a bleeding wound right underneath his armpits or nearest equivalent. He growled and hissed as the blade fell downwards.

The King brought his hand forward and his sword flew into his hands.

Alvin took notice. "Nice weaponâ€¦" he hissed.

"That you have damaged," the King said, raising his sword up to let it hit sunlight. "Long has it been that the steel tasted blood; it does not cut as it once used to."

Both combatants stared at each other, both waiting for the next instant for the next part of the battle to begin. The King's attire was looking worse off, burned in places, his flesh seemed scalded and still warm from the heat. It was a wonder that he was still standing, then again, said body was literally conjured out thin air from the dust. Alvin however was looking better by the moment, the blood in

his wound oozing ever slower down his abdomen, the wound sealing up faster than blood could escape.

I looked at them both, fearful for what would happen next. If Alvin won, I had a good idea he would destroy me. If the King won, he would destroy me in a different way.

Toothless approached me, panting heavily. "Should we get out of here? Or do weâ€¦ fight?" He hefted his mud encrusted crossbow and raised his sights over to the other two. Both fighters were moving around each other as if they were in some sort of endless dance, one motion leading to the next, anticipating when the first blow would be struck, an unkillable monster versus an impossible warrior.

I frowned at my brother's words; I knew what he was he thinking and who might have been his first choice to skewer. "I don't think that'd be a smart idea." For one, Alvin could still probably still catch the bolt mid air and stop the attack if he believed he was going to be the target. And of course, the King might not appreciate it if we decided to attack him right now. And even if we did beat him, the real King was still on the island and very likely going to be angry.

Toothless frowned at me, his disagreement clear on his sullen face. He turned to me, lowering his crossbow. "We can't fight either of them!"

"I know!" I replied, trying to think about this more Either Alvin or the King'sâ€¦ whatever he wasâ€¦ could beat us. We couldn't keep Alvin around wanted to kill us. The King wanted to practically enslave us, so we couldn't exactly ally with him. Both bad choices that were really, really bad... Did I have to choose either of them? "We have to fight both of them."

Toothless blinked at me, almost stunned. "But we just said either of them wereâ€¦"

I must have sounded so crazy for going against my word earlier. "We take them both outâ€¦ somehow." I shook my head. No, that wasn't true. "We just have to make sure thatâ€¦ whoever wins, we could beat himâ€¦"

"Attritionâ€¦" Toothless muttered.

I nodded. Even the seemingly invincible and quick to recover had limitsâ€¦ at least, that is what I hoped. Alvin wanted to kill us, but the King didn't.

Shouts went off. Toothless and I turned. The warriors charged in at each other, lunging with claws and sword meeting each other halfway. The King was the first to step away to scuffle, hitting a tree with his blade and causing the thing to fall on top of Alvin. The Exterminator however, learned from past mistakes and blasted the lumber with a lance of pure, engulfing flame. The King was caught in the fire, giving Alvin another opportunity to engage his foe. The King however was not one to quit. He picked up the burning tree with his bare hands and knocked Alvin down yet again.

There were a few ways this plan of mine could backfire. Alvin for instance could have brought some of his Outcasts with him and they're

somewhere on the island. Granted, we didn't see any of them yet. Even more pressing was the King and how he was going to respond to us basically taking advantage of this interruption. Well, Alvin wasn't an ally of mine, I certainly didn't organize this happening; I could argue that his involvement is no different from having a bear interrupt our fight and I am betting he's already listening to me think about this all, so if the King is listening; I really didn't have any choice left and it should go without saying that none of this was what I expected.

Toothless and I gave silent nods to each other and we readied our attacks.

Toothless lobbed one shot, an exploding burst going off behind Alvin's back. The dragon hunched over, stunned for a brief moment for the King to slice at his scaly side, planting a sword through him.

Alvin yelped, glowing fluids oozing out of his pale body. He flailed and convulsed, wanting to break free from the sword. The warrior loomed over him, bronze skin glistening at

Oh no. The sun how much time left?

I didn't hesitate anymore and lobbed a shot towards, the King, knocking him back and forcing him to let go of his sword. He turned to look at me, an expression in his eyes that was unreadable. Was that anger? Rage? Or disappointment?

Alvin broke free, the sword still in his belly and he howled with fury.

The King's form did not have anymore time to contemplate my actions. He rushed towards a nearby boulder and lifted it over his head in a single quick motion. He launched towards the charging dragon.

Alvin charged through the stone, shattering it into pieces as his claws sliced it, his fury seemingly granting him more strength. Shrapnel filled the area and I blocked Toothless with my wing to keep him from getting hurt. This fight was going to get even worse

Alvin, though he broke the incoming stone, was still recovering from his exertion, but the King was still active and ready. He moved over to an area that was packed full of dense trees and large stones. He stomped his foot on the ground and the things pulled themselves out! And then if by some invisible force, he hurled them right at his opponent. The Exterminator was forced to duck, dodge, weave, and destroy to avoid the flurry of stuff and quick healing or not, it was definitely taking its toll, each item getting harder and harder for him to counter or react to.

Eventually, one of Alvin's claws broke, the impossibly hard material shattering as it was used to break against a tree. Alvin roared and blasted thing away with a volley of fire, but there was so much coming his way.

As much as I wanted to see Alvin getting buried under at least a dozen houses worth of building supplies, the King was still functioning. Toothless took the initiative and lobbed two explosive

bolts at the King. The blast knocked him off his feet, explosion burning off several layers of his tunic, though his bronze skin still seemed unharmed. He turned to look at my brother, giving him the same look he gave me. Yeah, I know, we made ourselves his enemy even more.

That was all the opportunity Alvin needed to dig himself out of the pile of material that formed around him. But instead of going out of his way to face the King yet again, he instead focused his burning eyes over to me and my brother. "Treachery." He turned to his opponent and snarled. "They betray you, too! They must die!"

The King shook his head. "Be that as it may. I will deal with them in my own time." He touched himself on the chest and for the first time I realized that the king was taking damage. Ash and embers seeped from a small tear in his rib cage, like there was a fire burning right inside of him that was slowly easing out. "This form is not long, but it does not matter."

Alvin snarled in contempt. "Then stay out of my way!" He stepped forward, clearly hoping to slay us. Toothless and I backed away; I shielded by brother with a wing to make sure that whatever Alvin did, I'd take the first blow.

The King grabbed hold of the dragon's wing, causing him to stop. "I will say this one more time; do not harm them." I do not think I will ever understand this about the thing; why was he still looking to "protect" us even when we betrayed him right then and there. Most people by now would want nothing to do with us, yet here he wasâ€|

Alvin hissed and brushed the warrior off his wing. "These two have brought me great suffering! They will pay!"

The King was then sent flying back, but I didn't see Alvin lay a finger on him. The warrior planted his blade firmly into the ground, tearing jagged earth as he attempted to slow his fall. "How?" he gasped.

Alvin looked at the warrior again, eyes burning brighter. "Anyone that stands in my way will taste a mere fraction of my suffering!" he declared. Earth cracked around Alvin as though some sort of intangible force was crushing it...

The warrior looked like he was having a hard time trying to stand, as if there was some weight that was constantly pushing him back or dragging him into the ground. In fact, his feet were sinking into the earth and the tear his sword made was growing constantly wider.

Before I could wonder more about the King's effigy of a man, Toothless collapsed to the ground right beside me. He was grasping his head, trying to cover his ears.

"Toothless!?" I bent down and tended to my brother.

"Make that noise stop!" he gagged, curling himself into a tight ball.

There was nothing seemingly wrong with himâ€| yet he was acting as

though he was hearing something loud enough to cause him pain. Yet no matter what I could do, even with my enhanced senses, I couldn't hear anythingâ€¦ Becauseâ€¦ because of my armor!

I turned a look at Alvin once again as he approached the King with a murderous look that paled in comparison to ours. Alvin, Alvin was given a Gift, some power, like Mom and Dadâ€¦ That's why I didn't hear anything! Because my armor protected me from a bunch of stuff like that.

"Iâ€¦ see that you far more dangerous than you appeared to be..." the King spoke behind clenched teeth. He took his sword from the ground and hefted it forward with shaking hands. His body was looking torn up, ember and ash escaping through large cracks. "That power you haveâ€¦ you hear that all the timeâ€¦ don't you? I wager you hate the one who gave it to you..."

Alvin seemed to ponder those words a little, his gaze still burning. He seemed to be enthralled by the King's words, as if the information sparked something. "You know?"

Maybe if I had more time, I would have let the conversation proceed. Something told me that what the King might have said here and now was going to be important. But Toothless was still suffering, listening to a silent song that tore the earth around us.

I made my move. Alvin was distracted right now, the King holding his attention. I knew that it was probably the stupidest thing ever to engage an opponent that had blades for claws right up closeâ€¦ but I needed to get his attention - all of it right now!

"You fool!" the King shouted.

I leapt on top of Alvin's back and sank teeth into the dragon's neck. If we were both human, he would have had a very massive size advantage over me, but that difference between our size and weights was much smaller as dragons. Plus, I had somewhere like over a hundred pounds of extra weight in the form of lots and lots of steel right on me. My charge toppled the dragon over and landed into the dirt.

We both broke off from one another and then quickly rose to meet each other's gaze.

"Youâ€¦" I earned Alvin's burning hatred then and there, for whatever good that was.

"Me," I confirmed. A quick glance over to Toothless shown that my brother was beginning to rise onto his feet. The King too was slowly recovering his posture. Okay, that worked. Now who will save me?

Alvin stepped forward, clawed talons raised. He only gave an intimidating growl that also seemed to crack the earth beneath his feet.

Iâ€¦ did not have enough composure left in me to give a smart reply to Alvin; I backed away. Even if I was protected from Alvin's extraordinary powers, he could still tear steel apart with his bare hands.

Alvin lunged. Unfortunately, due to fatigue and the weight of my protection, this time I couldn't escape, but at least I could witness myself getting mauled to death first hand! I laid flat on my back, Alvin right ontop of me.

I raised my paws up and tried to push the other dragon off me, but gravity was working against me. About my only saving grace was that Exterminator forelegs were shorter than those of a Night Fury. He thrashed his claws wildly, cutting into my skin and chest. My armor was gave me some protection, slowing him down, but it was failing me more and more as he cut into me. I wailed as my blood was spilled, the pain intense! Jaws, chest, my neck, my limbs, Alvin wanted to hack me apart!

I kept trying desperately to push of the Exterminator or conjure another plasma blast to knock him off, but I wasn't going to win this battle.

And then, I didn't need to.

Alvin broke off his attack. I had a brief moment of clarity where I saw in vivid detail what happened.

The King brought a sword down in the space where Alvin's head once occupied, but the Exterminator was ready for that.

Alvin whipped his tail and knocked the blade right out of the King's hands.

The King summoned his sword once again, the blade slowly returning to his side.

Alvin leapt on top of the warrior.

The blade returned to his hands.

Both swung.

A clawed talons flew off: Alvin's right arm.

The sword fell to the ground, nearly falling onto my head and blocking my view over the final parts of that confrontation.

I blinked a few times, my vision surreal and blurred out from pain and blood loss. The blade before me then crumbled into black dust, letting me see the end.

The warrior's crumpled to his knees, a burning gash large as his own arm decorated the King's body like a sash. His arms were limp, no longer holding the monstrous strength he used to have. He looked at Alvin in the eyes, defiant. "You have not won-"

But Alvin would not hear anymore of that; he cut the warrior down, the man dispersing into bones and ash that thankfully all turned to dust and ash.

Alvin then crumpled to the ground, and looked at the burning stump where his right arm used to be. He licked the wound clean lapping the blood. He was in serious pain and was looking for ways to relieve

himself. "First that boy makes me lose my forcesâ€|" he muttered to himself. "Then this fool makes me lose a limbâ€|"

That was my cue to do the escape. I rose onto my feet, trying to hold in my last bits of my breastplate fell off from my body, useless hunks of metal now, but it did its job. I couldn't tell if my wounds were deep. Everything was sore. I don't know how long it'd take for me to recover, but I know for sure I was going to be feeling this in the morningâ€| assuming I lived that long.

Alvin turned slowly to me, growling a warning growl. He was not done with me yet. "Where do you think you're going?"

I gulped.

"Away from you!" An explosion formed near Alvin's feet, causing the beast to block it with his wing. Toothless approached me, holding his crossbow. "Are you okay?"

"I'll manageâ€|" I coughed. I felt a little sore, I had only a glimpse of how bad things looked.

Alvin growled. He might have had only a single upper limb left, but I knew just as well that that could have been enough to cut either of us down with a good clean hit.

"The blade," I rasped. Gram should have done something by now. Should have helped us defeat the King. There was only hope it would work against Alvin. "The other one. Do you?"

Toothless raised his crossbow up high, pulling the loading crank in a quick motion. "That thing's useless," my brother complained. "I'm not drawing it."

Alvin sniffed the air, his posture wild, almost feral. He could practically tell he was imagining himself enjoying the kill. He edged closer, one final pass with no big, beefy warrior to stand between. His taloned feet clacked against the earth, threatening to rip something apart.

Toothless and I slid backward, my brother up front, hoping to fend the beast away with an explosive bolt. I was in no condition to fight yet, in fact, I had no idea how long it would be before I could even move without everything aching.

Alvin licked his lips. "Time to die."

He then leapt.

Toothless fired, the shot missing.

And then a gigantic paw landed right on top of Alvin, pinning him to the ground, the earth cracking and dust being kicked up into the air. Alvin howled with pain, frustration, and overall a need for vengeance.

Toothless and I both felt the blood drop from our heads as we suddenly saw the King, all many pairs of eyes look below us all. It seemed unbelievable to imagine that he came here without any of us noticing. We both didn't know what was going to happen next.

Above the King was the silhouettes of other dragons. A few I recognized as the landed nearby. "Astridâ€|?" I wondered.

The Nadder looked at me with a sullen face and noddedâ€| and then she noticed what happened to me and her cold and stoic expression turned to a look of worry. "You're not looking to goodâ€|"

"I knowâ€|"

Alvin complained and desperately tried to lunge us, but he was trapped beneath the paw of a being that saw him as a man would see a mouse.** "Well done for defeating my Avatar,"** he spat in mock congratulations. **"But you do not have the right, nor the claims necessary to challenge me, nor have you done so through the proper channels. You will receive nothing."**

Alvin roared and thrashed, a caged animal.

More of friends landed nearby. Some looking rather beaten, still standing, but beaten. Why Fishlegs and Meatlug looked more beat up than Snotlout and the others, I wasn't sure ofâ€| They all looked at me, their expressions a little bleak.

"What'sâ€| what's going on?" Toothless asked, the only human in the group. He recieved a bunch of odd looks from all of the dragons nearby, most especially the leaders of the Enclaves we disappointed.

Stormfly approached my brother and answered her with a frown. "Itâ€| it's over."

I felt a little paler.

"**My first decree is thus," **spoke the King, eyes fixated on the mere insect that defied him. **"I banish you from my domain." ** He took Alvin in his paw and then hurled the man off the island so fast he reached the horizon before I could act.

Toothless and I exchanged a silent look to each other and had an idea of what the second of the King's decrees would be.

Massive eyes turned towards us. **"I am disappointed in both of you," **said the giant. **"You continue to defy me, even going so far as to cheat in a challenge by using an interloper, nay a traitor as a distraction."**

No one said anything.

"**Moreover, you threatened to overthrow me mere moments away from receiving my freedom, have fought against your own parents, and moreâ€| "**

A part of me wanted to say: "you made us do that", but I don't think that was going to work here. Especially since I felt like I couldn't speak with all of the eyes looking at me right now.

But what really sent chills down my spine were his last words: **"But I will not hold such things against you."** And let me just say, that was terrifying to ponder.** "It is clear to me that such behaviors

and actions are the results of your exposure to the Herd altering your perceptions and causing you to act ignobly. Consistently throughout numerous generations, your bloodline has shown itself to be heavily swayed and thus made unreliable due to Herd exposure corrupting you. Perhaps I am at faultâ€|but I will correct this now."**

He unfurled his wings, massive, massive things that blocked out the sun. He beat his wings, rising above the earth, it seemed almost impossible that he could even fly. **"I will destroy that which has twisted you so. Your old homeland shall be remade."**

And then Toothless and I just knew we were totally, totally doomed.

Sorry this took so long. I've had to start classes recently. In any case, those of you having a hard time imagining Alvin, imagine a really mean and buff looking raptor.

66. Chapter 66

Disclaimer: Dream Works and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.

I fell to the ground, my body feeling like a heavy lump. My weapon fell to my feet, useless, like I should be called. I saw the great beastâ€| King above me flap its massive wings, gusting wind flowing around me as he soared overhead. A small legion followed in his wake. Hiccup and I both knew it was hopeless.

I wondered if this had all been worth it, if the things that I been through could have taken me anywhere but where I was now. I thought back to a day so long ago, back when I was a different person, where I would have been overjoyed to learn that my Lord was soon to be set free. I dreamed of piles of fish then, of earning standing and fame, and place at his side. I had big dreams, big hopes...

Now I feared them coming true. I almost wish I still remained ignorant, unknowing about the truth. Weâ€| I...had no way of facing the monster and I could just feel the suffering he would unleash upon my adoptive home, noâ€| my real home.

It was all over now and there was nothing I could do to stop it. Our last chance at stopping him was futile.

Who was I kidding myself? I didn't have any hope facing the King before either. He easily defeated Hiccup and I using thatâ€| puppet of his and I really should have known that the chances of me defeating him were about as good as me defeating a mountain with my first. All of that effort, that planning, was a waste. I was too weak to avenge either of my parents, too useless.

I picked up that stupid sword from the ground. In many ways it was the root for all of this insanity. Its pieces started this all! My entire life became as twisted as it did because of that stupid curse it carried forced me and my mother into being dragons! The monster never would have been able to set any of this up if we had just stayed as we should have!

I threw it onto the ground, the metal clanging against the dirt. I hoped it shattered into pieces, but I couldn't hope for anything good happening right now, could I?

I howled out my frustrations, babbling out curses to whatever powers I could name. The Aesir that Hiccup told me about, they should have helped! We had that stupid, useless sword!

I felt a wing touch my shoulders and I brushed it off, not caring who it was wanted to bother me! "Leave me!" I shouted, facing the dirt. I pulled out my own hair, the pain practically soothing compared to what was going on inside me!

"Toothless!" a voice called.

I gritted my teeth and pounded a fist into the dirt. "Go away!" I just wanted to wallow in my misery.

I then found myself eating dirt. I spat out dirt and blinked the rest off my face. I turned onto my back and came face to face with a Nadder's gaze. Stormfly looked at me impatiently.

"What do you want from me?" I demanded, pushing myself off. I was not in the mood. I didn't want to do this. Not right now.

I dashed off, somewhere, anywhere. I didn't care, didn't want to know where I went. There were trees everywhere and no one insight.

I leaned my back against the nearest one I could find and slid down, panting heavily and regretting the day I was hatched. From the very beginning it was all just a set up, a fight that we couldn't win. And the King knew it. He played us all from the start.

And I just knew that whatever happened from now on, he was the one going to decide my fate. I let out a tearful chuckle. I bet he was still planning to put me in some command position. What harm could I do to him, when he defeated us so easily?

"Toothless," a voice called out from behind me, probably from the other side of the tree. It wasn't Stormfly this time, just my brother!

I didn't say anything back, I didn't want to speak.

"We lost pretty badly!" he said, his tone almost sorrowful, almost laughing. How funny was it to sum up the big understatement of the year?

I kept my head down and curled into a ball, staying silent. What else was there to do? Especially since I was the cause of all this. If I had never met my brother, maybe we would have been better off!

"... It's probably my fault," he said.

I blinked, my head rising out from my knees. I uttered a single word. "... What?"

Hiccup responded. "If I never wanted to become a big hero, none of this would have ever happened. I was to selfish, too

destructive."

I did not like hearing any of that. Why was the big idiot blaming himself all of a sudden? "Well, if I never took Squirehood, you wouldn't have met me. You probably would have bagged some other dragon eventually!"

"Yeahâ€¦ Mom," said Hiccup, his tone firm. He left from his spot onto the tree and I saw his shadow looming over me. "If you weren't there, I still would have caused this problem, a lucky hit was all I needed to start dooming everyone!"

I grit my teeth. Why was he taking blame for something that clearly wasn't his fault? I rose and met my brother face to face. "... I should have known better, known that he wanted to do against our Tribe! I was the only one could have stopped him!" Instead, all I was thinking of was how great it would be to act as some diplomat or something.

I don't know what else we bickered about or how long. I didn't understand why my brother wasn't willing to accept my reasons. He should have named me Hopeless or Worthless or somethingâ€¦ It would have fit me better.

But something changed. A voice spoke in between us, alerting us to someone else in our midst. "... Maybe you two should stop arguing with each other?" We both turned and foundâ€¦ a Gronckle.

"...Youâ€¦ I know you." It was that same dragon I seen before, the old one mother tore the wings off of in a fit of rage or a display of force. He was looking better since then, his wings slightly healed. Still probably a cripple for the rest of his life. He met me beforeâ€¦ like this way back when. I narrowed my eyes. He was the servant of the King, a loyalist afterall. "What do you want?"

Hiccup turned a glance at me and then at him. "... It's awfully strange of you to come here. Shouldn't you be watching the King burn down our home or something?"

"Wellâ€¦ no," the dragon admitted. "I am simply wondering about the fate of the Kin defeated here this day. You've had a rough time..."

My face immediately turned glum. "That'sâ€¦ a sore point."

Hiccup nodded, finally agreeing with me. "Uhâ€¦ thanksâ€¦ I guessâ€¦ But we're kind of in a moment here."

The dragon nodded. "Iâ€¦ understand that you are bothered, butâ€¦ isn't there anything you can do?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Like what?" Something bothered me about this dragon now that I thought about it; but I couldn't be sure what it was. It seemed too convenient for him to be here. In fact, I just realized he wasâ€¦ understanding me. No dragon did that without some magical reason for doing so.

"Ourâ€¦ My Lord is going to your homeland to destroy your Kin is he not?" spoke the dragon.

I ground my teeth together. I didn't like being reminded. "And what do you want us to do?"

The dragon shook himself, a shrug. "I don't know, butâ€¦ can't you go there and do something about itâ€¦?"

"What? It's beenâ€¦ I don't know. The King has headstart how- Hey!" Hiccup tore off something from my belt, a small satchel. "What that about?"

"I kept reminding you, but you kept forgetting." He then nudged it open and pushed out a runestone.

I blinked a few times, suddenly remembering. "Oh, thatâ€¦" Now I feel like an idiot forgetting. I shook my head and then turned back the Gronckle. "Okay, so we have THAT, but what do you expect us to do with it? We can't win against the King!"

"There's different kinds of winningâ€¦" said the Gronckle. "Your homeland will burn, that much cannot be stoppedâ€¦"

A realization dawned on me, something that I wasn't quite sure what it was. Maybe a possibility to salvage something from our losses. "... But the people don't have toâ€¦"

Hiccup turned to me, eyes squinting at me skeptically. "Weâ€¦ can't evacuate the island. There's not enoughâ€¦ boats for it. Maybe send them to the forest while they burn everything else."

I nodded. It was better than nothing. We didn't know what the King's opening move against our home was going to look like, but I bet considering the... cold anger he practically radiated he left, it wasn't going to look pretty. A preemptive evacuation would cut down on casualties. And if that won't work, well, maybe we can cause everyone to negotiate the surrender fasterâ€¦ "He could be there any moment now. We better hurry."

Hiccup nodded to me. He then turned towards the Gronckle. "Uhâ€¦ thanks for remind us. Uh, can you do us a favor?"

The Gronckle smiled, as if he already knew what was needed of him. "Do not worry. I will tell your friends you will depart without them." He then went on to lick my feet in the sort of submissive respectful way, getting a little too close for comfort for my tastes and then dashed off.

I shook my head. Something was off about him, but it didn't matter right now. I took the runestone in my hand and felt a warm glow emanating from the center. I wished that I had better handwriting, because I didn't know if this thing was going to work. I mean we haven't really tested it all too far away from home. This could have been dangerous.

I turned to my brother.

He gave me the go ahead.

I got on top of his back and sincerely wished that if there was anyone out there who had our backs, they'd do so right now. I focused my attention to the stoneâ€¦ and hoped this would work.

My body felt lightweight, the stone slowly crumbling to dust in my hands. I grabbed onto my brother's neck, hoping that he would could with me. The world spun, the vision was dark, senses failed me. I could not feel anything save for the eerie pull of something choking my lungs. Even the dull pains and aches that I had from the fight with the King were still on me were gone; that seemed to hurt even more.

And then I could breathe, see, and feel everything goodâ€¦ and bad. My pains and aches suddenly turned to me in a dizzying wave, made worse by new pains. "Stopâ€¦ crushing meâ€¦" I groaned.

Hiccup lifting himself off me, giving me room.

I picked myself off the gro- floor and took a deep breath. We were home, in only a matter of seconds, we came back.

The Librarian and the Traitor all had tools, implements carved in runes. While Hiccup and I still weren't sure what a good deal of them were for, one set of symbols we sort of had an idea of what they did.

A while back, my brother and I recall an incident where the Meatheads' own Hairy Scary Librarian constantly somehow kept appearing ahead of us every time we passed him while we were running away. It was odd because well, he wasn't all that fast that he could have kept up with us like that, especially given his age. During my fight with Mildew something similar happened, where that sorry old man and I kept ending up in the ship's hold for some odd reason. I didn't really get it at the time, my attention focused on other things, but Hiccup realize there was a trick about it. They had the ability to appear seemingly _anywhere_ they wanted.

I touched my hand over to roughly indents on the floor. The trick was there had to be a place set up before hand to go to, our living room seemed to be just the spot. We could come back hereâ€¦ so long as we had a specially made runestone for it. I brushed the dirt off my hand and rose. Too bad they tended to crumble to dust when we used 'em.

Hiccup busted the front door down, busting out without any hesitation despite spending a good chunk of time reattaching the thing before we left. Right. We had no time to lose.

I musted what strength I could, jumping onto Hiccup one more time. We dashed off through the streets and roads. He didn't fly, we wanted to be heard loud and clear. "We have to leave! Get out of the village!"

There were looks of surprise, astonishment, worry. They were probably expecting us to comeback as victors, not shout out doom and warning. Everyone, men, women, children, and even dragons looked at us in terror.

Hiccup told the few who could understand him what he could. "Everyone get to the woods!"

"They're an attack incoming!" I shouted.

The villagers all looked at each other and began speaking in startled tones, gossiping, suggestion, wondering to trust us right now. We were after all alone and probably not looking the best.

"In broad day-light?"

"Here? Now?"

"What's happening, Mum?"

"Why don't we fight? Like always!"

I shook my head; they aren't listening! "We cannot win this!" I shouted. "Everyone evacuate Berk now!"

"What's all the commotion!" A voice called from the crowd. Hiccup and I stopped our dash and turned towards Gobber, hammer-in-hand. The crowd of upset Vikings parted way for him. "What're you doing back here? Shouldn't you be off uh fighting right now?"

"There's not much time!" I barked. "Everyone has to leave the village!"

The villagers weren't moving. Even the dragons hesitated.

"Leave our homes? I just got the door working for me again!"

"Why should we trust them after everything that's happened? Especially to us!"

I gritted my teeth. Why wouldn't they believe us? "There's an army of dragons coming our way!"

"Why can't we fight this?" Said a villager.

"It's like every now and again, really. Dragons attack the village."

A few even turned towards the remaining dragons in the town. They all pulled off mock roars, pretending to cause havoc as if to remind the villagers about how often the Flights came to destroy.

"They don't trust us." Hiccup sighed. "Well, it was bound to happen eventually."

Gobber's eyes cocked into a squint. He put a big meaty hand upon my shoulder. "Well, alot of things have been going on, things beyond the norm, especially under you boys's running of things. They don't know what to do here. They don't know why to believe you?" He sighed.

A heavy feeling fell upon my chest. I don't know what, but it left me uneasy.

Hiccup turned to me, as if he knew what was going on in me more than I did. "We've never quite told them why we did everything we did, did we?"

I took a deep breath. "We haven't" We've keeping everyone in the

dark as a matter of convenience. I remember a time when I loathed lying more than I did now; I felt it was dishonest for me to refer to myself as anything but a dragon but I did so because I knew I would have been destroyed if I did. I also hated the fact that I was not told about who I was at the start, so much so that I really went out of my way to embrace my human side. When it came time to expand the deception, to add the other Squires, it was too easy to just keep things as they were, never revealing anything to all but the most trusted. Heck I even got my father into it, helping us keep a clear profile. We never even told anyone about the danger we've been facing, the real depth of it...

Hiccup looked to me with pleading eyes. "Tell them what you think you need to."

I nodded, silently thinking about what needed to be done. I could just tell them about the King, about the danger he posed and how he was going to crush everything under his gigantic feet. But I knew, I just knew... I knew that if I wanted to earn the villagers' attention, I had to trust them with something more.

"I was hatched... a Night Fury."

Several sets of eyes all blinked simultaneously. Aside from Gobber, the only ones not responding with at least a mild bit of surprise were the few remaining natural born dragons on the island, not really seeing the significance.

Hiccup surveyed the crowd. "Well, that got their attention."

I gritted my teeth in an awkward grin. No kidding. I had to continue on. "I was raised being told about a day when my ruler, a great dragon the likes of which no one here has ever seen, would rise up from his prison and lay claim to the rest of the world. That day is now."

That got several people's attention. If I didn't have their trust, at the very least no one was just outright ignoring me.

"I was brought up to be a servant to this creature, most dragons, most Kin are. We told him by him to make war, raid and pillage humans, the Herd, like...animals really because of his decrees. He leads an army to Berk right now as we speak."

Several people stood frozen, like ice.

It felt so exhausting to continue speaking like this, but I knew I had to. People started leaving, running. It was working. I just needed to push a little more. I wanted them to run as far away as possible.

"And the great terror, the King of dragons himself, the Red Death. He could flatten his own army by himself if you asked me. He's the size of a small mountain and he wields vast magical power. No one here could stand against him and he wants to destroy Berk! If you value your lives, I beg you to go, leave this place to burn!"

And that was it. The crowd scattered in a hundred directions, none of them going into their own homes. No one was crazy enough to fight the King when they knew what they were facing. Everything was finally

working as we wanted it.

I nearly collapsed onto the ground, a swell of different emotions and feelings driving me everywhere. Hiccup kept me from falling. I was so tired, exhausted. Yet at the same time, I felt a little off balance somewhere around my shoulders. I clutched my temples. "I feel light headed."

Gobber showed us us a wry grin. "Nah, that's just being honest." He patted me on the shoulder. "You did good."

I groaned. "...I think I'd rather be a liar."

If things were a little less hectic, I just knew the villagers would be swarming Toothless with questions, wondering about his changed allegiance, his history. A part of them probably wonder if that story was all a big fib. But the threat of impending doom was too great of a threat to ignore; everyone who heard my younger brother's message was left their homes, stopping onto to tell others or pack only the barest of essentials. This wasn't like how in previous raids the dragons were mostly interested in food though; most if not everyone was expecting to lose their homes.

...Even me.

I stood at the foot of the door one last time. The building took lots of abuse in the past few weeks, mostly from my frustration and the fact that I couldn't really do much to keep everything fixed without hands.

It was the only house I've really ever known, full of memories from when I was so young. I remember the first lessons my father tried to teach me to be a fighterâ€¦ before giving up and having me do something else. I remember faintly about how grandfather would come visit and tell me stories of places far away, of great heroes. I even remember the first time I remembered seeing a dragon, hiding behind the wooden windows and crying out in terror as it breathed flame. I remember meeting some of my friends for the first time here too, well, we weren't all that much friends until recently though.

There was a little too much for me to let go hereâ€¦ My vision blurred. The whole village, even this house was going to burn.

I turned to Toothless who looked at the building with an empty look between his eyes, he wasn't sure what he was supposed to feel. "Weâ€¦ we going?" He said, his voice trembled. I just knew what was going through his head, the sense of loss for a life that he knew he missed out on and that bothered him.

I nodded. we â€¦ couldn't stay here for too long; we never knew how much time we had left. With the warning to leave having gone off, the other villagers would spread the word as far and as wide as they could before leaving themselves. Evacuating the whole village was going to take some time, but I just knew I wanted to spend a little of that settling things here.

Toothless jumped on me and I took off on a sprint. I knew I could fly, but I still ached a little bit from being thrashed around. At least Toothless wasn't a pain to carry. "I just hope this works," he said. I could still hear a bit of disappointment in his voice. Heâ€¦

hated that we were being forced to abandon our home.

"It's not that bad," I tried to reassure him.

"Yes, it is." He groaned a complaint. Okay, I wasn't helping myself much either saying that, but there were a whole lot worse fates. My brother called out some villagers and told them of the doom that was happening on to the town. Everyone was leaving, well, most everyone. A fewâ€¦ still weren't leaving their homes without proof of anything. My brother and I were forced to pass them by.

With any luck, the King would just keep his attention on the buildings and not on the people.

"**Why did you intervene?" **a voice called from nowhere. It was him, of course. No one else. He still had the connection, probably saw through everything we just did.

I thought about it some. Maybe, I could talk to the King, talk him out of this crusade early.

"**You should have done nothing. Many of them deserve to burn for your mistreatment,"** came the reply.

Once again, I didn't understand what it was with the King's focus on "me". Why did they need to die over petty crimes? I saw no point to it. I saw no point to this whole endeavor.

"Uhâ€¦ Hiccup?" called Toothless.

"Not now." I said. I needed to focus on the King, can't have distractions. Why was the King so intolerant of us humans?

I felt a snarl go ground my ears, a painful screech that seemed to rattle me to the core. Theâ€¦ King did not like that at all.

"Hiccup, look!" Toothless called again.

This time I snapped out of it, not wanting to go deal with the King'sâ€¦ speech bursting my head.

I saw my brother raise a hand and I saw it: the cloud of dragons was close, close enough that a man could squint his eyes and start telling which of them were which kind. But the real sight to behold was the massive creature whose great wings looked like they could block out the sun at this angle. I was too busy thinking to realize that they had come so soon, but here they were.

Several would have been stragglers saw the sight and quickly parted ways, making up their mind then and there. I didn't blame them.

"**Running will not save themâ€¦" **the whisper came to me.
"Neither hiding out in the wilderness."

My blood ran cold. We came all this way to save the villagers andâ€¦ it wasn't going to work? They were no threat to the King! They couldn't possibly be a danger.

"**If only you knew of what **_**the Herd **_**would be capable of," **he replied. **"I must cull them when I can and judge those who require it; I promise that there will be some amnesty, but stay out of my way." **

"Hiccupâ€|?" Toothless stepped into my view. "What'sâ€| going on? You're just staring into blank space?"

I shook my head and wished I had teeth grind. "The Kingâ€| will do more than burn the village. He'll go after the people even then."

Toothless's eyes lit up with some shock. "How'dâ€| you know that?"

I shook my head. I wasn't the only one keeping secrets, but unlike before, I didn't think I had time to tell him the full details just yet. I decided that after this, I'll tell my brother, either in this life or the next. "We have to slow him down," I told him. Note that I did not say "beat". "Maybe buy the villagers more time orâ€|"

"But if he's going after the villagers, would that time be of any help? What could they do with more time?"

"I don't know!" Maybe run further away? I flexed my wings and took off into the skies.

"This is insane!" cried my brother.

"**Listen to him. He speaks the truth. Come fight us and you will be destroyed," **I heard him speak in my head.. But I didn't listen to either them. I needed to, do something, anything really!

The King and his dragons were heading closer now, like an advancing tidal wave. I never seen or imagined so many dragons all once; the force made up of dragons from all over the Archipelago, from not just the King's own, some from the Enclaves, and some even from the force I managed to convince join us before. I know for a fact it wasn't all of the dragons that swore loyalty to their Lord, but that still didn't stop us from getting out numbered like a dozen thousand ways.

I still kept going.

"**I blame this stubbornness on your flawed heritage. I am sorry," **said the whisper.

The King let out a roar. "**Warriors, strike them down!" **He howled.

I gulped. Yeah, definitely ran out of patience. I swerved as a dozen dragons all came upon us, blasting flame in our wake.

Their aim off just by hairs.

"Brilliant plan!" complained Toothless. "How are we supposed to fight?"

I ducked and dodged more fire, turning back to the the village. We were above the cliffs now. We weren't going to last too long, not with all of the fatigue we built up today. No, at best we could just

manage to slow the advance downâ€¦ somewhat. "Do we have anything to fight with?"

Toothless groaned, clinging onto my neck. "Of course not. I left my things behind back with theâ€¦ hey when did I get the sword back?" he asked himself.

For a moment, I almost ended up getting roasted out of the sky when I stopped to think about it. A lucky shot from the much slower Gronckles could have ended us right then and there. Last I checked, Toothless tossed his sword aside while we were still on the islandâ€¦ when did we get it back? Well, the good news is that we at least had a weapon to fight, even with its limited reach. "Use it!" I said. Gram might have been near useless in our fight against the King but it was something.

Turning a look back for a split second towards the gigantic flock of dragons. The King was a titanic flier, the greatest dragon ever. He seemed far too big for any creature on Midgard to even fly, but I guess being what he is, he kind of cheated. He was slow, only barely just qualifying his movements as flight as opposed to hovering. He was right at the docks now, and gaining. **"Now to burn this all," **he declared. He then let out a blast of flame and scorched off an entire neighborhood in a single gust.

Toothless groaned, obviously bitter about the sword not working so well. "Fine." I heard the sound of the sword getting pulled from its scabbard. "I guess I'll- woah!"

I got knocked around by a tackle from one of the dragons; Toothless was thrust up in the air while I was sent rolling onto my back mid flight for a split second. It all happened so fast; my brother swiped his blade, rending a wingâ€¦ despite being like a few feet away from the dragon. The dragon fell, his wings clipped.

I quickly twisted my body and caught my brother on my back. "Didâ€¦ you see that?"

Toothless let out aâ€¦ noise of stunned surprise. "Uh.. what happened?"

â€¦ So much for not having enough reach. When did the sword do that? Then again, Gram was noted for its ability to cut its own anvil in half just by falling on top of it, I guess it had the effect of also cutting through air.

Even the King seemed a little surprised. I couldn't hear anything resembling a word, but I knew he was startled, maybe a little afraid.

I had to wonder, why did the sword not display that sort of ability before? Maybe it was because we were not acting in good faith, having manipulated our way to facing the King? On the other hand, Odin had the title Oathbreaker for a reason and he's supposed to be or had already used Gram before. Maybe it needed us to defend our home, be suicidal? Did it matter?

I sped my way to avoid more fire, houses collapsing in the crossfire.

I soared and swerved and turned my body around and sped through the dragons chasing in a flash. They didn't expect it and were buffeted out of the way for the act. I dove my way straight to the King.

The great dragon's flames burned more of Berk, his escort doing the same. A few more dragons noticed us and joined the flock that was already chasing us. He took notice of me, whispering in my ears once more. **"Surely you have lost your mind."**

"Uh, you crazy. You can't take him." Toothless holding onto me with both hands, his sword dangling unsafely by my neck, but I tried not to think about it.

"Well, do you have any better ideas?" We were slowly getting sandwiched by more fliers and I didn't have any idea how much more strain I could put on my body. Fast healing or not, I had limits. Besides, if the King was able to know what I was thinking, planning, well, maybe the best plans shouldn't come from me.

"One," he edged more forward. "Wait on my mark."

I did so. I had to tackle my way through several dragons who got in the way, narrowly avoiding a fatal stop. Toothless had to swing his sword around a few times, cutting, nicking, downing dragons with Gram. We charged until we were in right about the King's airspace, the great one's servants clearing him a wide berth.

"Die!" He roared, a blazing torrent erupted from his mouth. We swung underneath, the flames cutting their way through scorched each.

I blasted my way through a burned out building to give us more room.

The flame stopped a few seconds after the King's Breath, still needing to be gathered. "There's this one trick I know!" said Toothless.

We burst out of the burned out building, looking straight up at the King's mouth. Sickly green gas like a Zippleback's gathered in his mouth. "Now!" ordered by brother.

I shot with the last bit of plasma I could muster, causing an explosion in the King's mouth. His head jerked back a bit from the explosion, several pieces of his lips were burned and even the seemingly flame proof body was catching fire that seemed to sear him in places it shouldn't. **"You dare?"** The beast growled. He was still flying though. Maybe if he was moving at a far faster speed, the damage would have been greater but I can't muse on that too long.

Toothless directed me to flying underneath the King's body. He let go and swiped his blade into the air and cut one of the titan's wings, drawing a shower of flame instead of blood.

In retaliation, as he fell onto the ground with a huge thud, the King nearly smashed a hole where we might have been a split second ago. I barely had enough time to do the evasion, but we made it.

A loud uproar of dust and earth scattered into air, nearly impossible

to see even the sun. Debris, rock, and wood scattered all over, forming a burnt tidal wave below us. I couldn't see what happen to the King. I just hovered there, waiting for the dust to subside.

"We got him!" Toothless declared.

I wasn't too sure. I waited, wanting to see the dust subside. It was still far too much to make out anything.

I hate being right. ****"You will regret that!" ****Came the King's roar. A massive paw burst out from the clouds, a reaching for our death!

I flew, hating the old adage of a down dragon being a dead dragon certainly seemed like it wasn't going to apply to the great beast anytime soon.

Even worse, hundreds of dragons noticed our assault on their leader and were forming a few thick perimeter, warding us away. I bet the only reason they weren't throwing fire at us was because they didn't want to get tried for treason later.

"What do we do now?" asked Toothless.

I really wish I knew what I was doing. The King was heavily wounded and I really hoped that if he wasn't there to give orders, that the other dragons would stop following his commands.

â€|If this doesn't earn me a spot on Valhalla, I was going to complain to Hel about my placement. I turned one last time and faced the King who advanced toward us pounding the Earth and forming craters with every step. "Are you you with me?"

I heard Toothless breathe in, as if steeling himself. "... Yeah. Let's go!"

I charged.

With a single paw, the King nearly flattened us like bugs, but one last dodge ensured us a path straight to the King's massive maw.

A single slash from Toothless's sword poked out a row of eyes, leaving a gash on the great dragon's face. He roared in pained agony.

And that was the opening we needed.

We faced his jaws. He roared. I flew in as close as I could. My brother swung his sword.

67. Chapter 67

****Disclaimer: DreamWorks and Cressida Cowell own the How to Train Your Dragon franchise.****

****Was there really no alternative way?****

My eyes flashed open, the sky wasn't there. Voices swirled and spoke around me in hushed tones hard to understand. Blackness came soon afterwards.

I remember sounds, screams. Fire everywhere, burning, yetâ€¦ I had to go in it.

****Was there nothing I could do?****

I felt hands moving my against my will. I struggled to free myself and then I felt pain against my whole body before I lost it again.

We struggled against a force of nature, testing our wills and resolvesâ€¦ and were devoured for it. A siren's call stole my breath.

****Everything was against me and I felt so helpless to stop it. It felt like the world and everyone in it was my enemy. ****

I saw the face of a Valkyrie. No, two of them. One of them was especially beautiful. I couldn't move or speak to them. Things were put into my mouth and I faded once more.

I had very little will left, but enough to shake myself free from the siren call. I kept fighting. I just hope my brother stayed the same.

****Why did it have to come to this? Why was I surrounded by people I could not count on?****

I opened my eyes again. My head spun, the world around me seemed to shake with every heartbeat. It wasn't mine. Something else was beside me, near me.

There was no other way. We had to strike, strike now. Even if it killed us. We were on the inside, his maddening call drowning out our thoughts and his firegas was choking out lungs. A bright glow formed at the bottom. There was no time.

****There was no more time. I had to act before it was too late. These creatures did not deserve peace or pittance, not after all of the suffer that had been at their hands. I had received nothing but sadness and betrayal because of them and I feared for the day when they choke us in smoke and drown out our very identityâ€¦ and I was out of time to stop it.****

Iâ€¦ was awake, yet so tired. Everything ached, like my head was up against a grindstone. I tried to open my eyes, but everything in my vision blurred, indistinct. There was a groaning rumbling noise nearby. I heard voices, hushed whispers from somewhere both distant and nearby, but I couldn't understand.

I turned to the source of the nearby noise and found a... Night Fury dozing off nearby me. I drew blanks for a few moments before the realization slowly dawned on meâ€¦ "Hiccup?" my voice felt dry. I moved a hand over to push him awake but then realized my limb had transformed into a large paw.

I blinked and turned to examine myself. How I was a Night Fury again? My cloak was destroyed back whenâ€¦ What happened? Where were we? Thisâ€¦ building was not our home.

I pushed my brother with a paw, hoping to stir him from slumber.
"Brother. Wake up!"

He groaned, slowly rising, "... Tooth...less?"

"Wake up! Wake up!" I told him. I recall vague, that were just fighting the King, so what happened? "We have to get out of here."

Hiccup still seemed out of it, but was trying to rise from whatever dizziness he had.

I rolled onto my belly and to stand, but I felt so weak, my limbs felt sore. I slowly dragged myself forward, leaving behind this rocky slab that was setup for us as a bed. I moved forward, gaining strength as I pushed.

But then, a large shadow came over me and I turned my head upward towards the source.

Two dragons looked down at me as I struggled to rise, both familiar. I felt a strange mix of worry and satisfaction. They greeted me with warm smiles and cold licks. I felt something inside me just dissolve into a bubbling fit of laughter.

"Welcome home, Sweetie!" my mother said to me.

The Nightmare, his body solidly crimson, let out a hearty bellow. The room seemed cramped for someone of his size, his body taking up like a fourth of the whole building and his head reaching up to the ceiling, but he did his best to try squeeze in. "He's too old for that, you know!"

The Night Fury seemed to take that with mild delight and gently shoved her body against the larger dragon's, as if to hint at knocking him down. "I don't know, he's the youngest of the pair..."

"...Only by like a year," I half-complained. I mean, I wasn't a child. At the same time I really missed my parents. How long had it been? Weeks for sure. Maybe a month? Years? No, nowhere near that long. But it felt like that.

Hiccup groaned and rose to meet us. He seemed to have less trouble at standing than I was; I'd call it cheating. He had the ability to just heal from most injuries quickly.

Mom and Dad both gave each other looks and then proceeded to give my brother the same treatment I received, showering him with licks and delicate affection.

"Ugh!" He backed away from the shower. "Maybe I should go wake up from this nightmare!"

Both everyone except him all gave off a little chuckle at his expense. "Oh, Son. I thought you had gotten used to that sort of thing. Now, I was hesitant at first, but I understand why you lick," our Dad said. He seemed to enjoy it.

Hiccup just stuck out his tongue, looking disgusted. "Yeah, but

you're my Dad! it's always gross."

I sniggered. Mom seemed like she was ready to burst.

The Nightmare rolled his eyes. "Har har," he mock laughed. "What's next? You going to make a crack about my weight? "

"Okayâ€¦" Hiccup sized him up. "You're heavier than you used to be and don't fit in any of your clothes..."

Mom gently pushed. "You walked into that one, you have to admit."

Dad grunted in a deadpan tone. "Wellâ€¦ not like I have any clothes anymoreâ€¦ " h

Everyone just laughed.

This was all so surreal. Back when I set out on this quest, I had always thought that we would all be celebrating as wellâ€¦ humans, everyone back to their true shapes. Now, we were all dragons andâ€¦ it didn't change anything. This still felt right, maybe even in some ways better than normal; now even our Father could take a part in this weird sort-of family tradition.

The scene was perfect when it came down it, like I never wanted to leave it.

But I had to know what happened, that worry wasn't going away easily

"So... What happened?" I managed to ask finally. "What happened to the King? Where are we?"

Mom and Dad both turned to each other with sheepish looks, the worrying kind. Did they have something they wanted to tell us?

"... Safe." my father said at last, his face stern. "That's all that matters."

Hiccup and I exchanged looks. What did he mean by that? That didn't answer my question. "What?" He said.

"Things have beenâ€¦ harderâ€¦" he replied.

"But better," my mother said. She bowed her head gracefully and let out a deep breath. "It has to be this way." Which bothered me, because I didn't know what "this way" meant.

"... Even though weâ€¦" Dad tried to say.

"... Yes." She nodded. "Even though we lost our home and nearly everything in itâ€¦"

Dad muttered something very slight under his breath. "Still can't believe he was rightâ€¦" he shook his head. "No I mean, them knowing aboutâ€¦ Well, you..."

She smiled and then turned to me for a brief moment before turning back at him. "They probably would have figured out eventuallyâ€¦" I

felt a guilty feeling in my chest, as I slowly figured out what she was saying. Yeah, once they knew I was a Night Fury once and raised as one, and that my brother turned into oneâ€¦ well, they had enough information to ask another question.

I wanted to change the topic. "What about..." I wanted to say before being cut off.

"The King is goneâ€¦ nothing left of him now, not even ash or bones," said my Dad. "Just ruin and craters."

I was hesitant, almost imagining something that seemed impossible. I wanted him gone, but thinking that he was just gone, seem to be a difficult thing for me. Hiccup though, Hiccup seemed to agree to that too easily. "Heâ€¦ is."

That took a while to sink in.

Mom stepped in to the dull silence. "Many of the King's servants went back to their homes; Especially those that hailed from the Free Enclaves." She explained. "Though the King fell in battle, his authority, his rulership hasn't transferred over to any clear leader or successor. When you slew him, there was infighting among the ranks over who would succeed him. Either of you for seemingly slaying him, the surviving Flight Commanders, many of the Free Enclave leaders. In the end..."

I nodded. I think I knew what was happening now. "No one could fight for the King's goals." Berk was saved due to a lack of direction and many not wanting to carry it out. "What happened next?"

She nodded. "Many Kin chose to remain here afterwards, as some see you as the rightful rulers, despite you not legally inheriting the King's titles.â€¦ Neither of you boys mind that do you?"

"... Uh, yes, uh no," Hiccup stumbled over his words before settling on what he wanted to say. "Uh, they can stay."

"Iâ€¦ don't see anything wrong with that." I didn't know what to think about it. On the one hand, I did not intent to somewhat succeed the Red Death. On the other, a small part of me liked the idea of being in charge.

Our Dad gave him an especially large smile. "Hmph, not even twenty years old and you're already adding more people to serve under you. Wonder which of you will inherit my right to rule..."

"Dad!" We both called him out.

He laughed and chuckled. "Only time will tell."

We heard some knocking on the door. Wellâ€¦gigantic sliding door for the front. Someone must have installed it just so that Dad could move in and out of thisâ€¦house we had. Father moved forward and slid the thing using a massive body.

And then, right there, Astrid and Stormfly were in the...doorframe, holding a basket of that held a warm scent inside, eyes flashed surprised, the funny thing wasâ€¦ only one of them was a Nadder. Stormfly threw the basket out of her hands. Astrid didn't have any

Stormfly fell off of her back.

"Hiccup!"

"Toothless!" They both called.

Hiccup and I exchanged glances, before running to meet them, smiles plastered onto our faces. It felt so long since either of us seen either of them.

Hiccup and Astrid both approached each other, forgetting they were dragons and grabbed onto each other as best as they could, standing on their hindquarters.

Meanwhile, I had this urge to lick Stormfly that I had to express. "Hey!" She laughed, gently slapping me. "Your spit is sticky! I won't get this out of my scarf!"

I gave her a sheepish smile. "Sorry" went unsaid.

She smiled and then patted me on the head. "Don't get yourself in a coma for week again, OK."

"I'll try not to," trying not to react too much. It's been a week? Really?

Over hearing my brother and his girlfriend. I think they were having a similar talk about not nearly going into a coma—only Hiccup's reply was, "...Sure, I'll just go tell everyone who wants to kill me to make sure I'm dead—"

From behind them, we could hear some shouts. We couldn't see the sources, because while the "door" was open, they were above our field of view. "Hey. What's the hold up?" It was Snotlout, my cousin.

"They're wasting our time that's what!" said a voice in Norse, one I didn't quite like the tone of.

"I'll get them!" said a voice in Norse. And then from the sky came Hookfang, in human form. He dusted himself off and then turned to us. "Wow. They're awake!"

At that, some of voices spoke in reply. Others came down.

"Really?" I think that was Fishlegs's voice weheard.

"That's wonderful!" Meatlug

"Aw man." Ruffnut the Terror. "Then who gets their stuff?"

"Well... I do. Ow!" And that sounded like Tuffnut getting his comeuppance.

"You can't even use it" said Barf. "You're too small."

The twin Terrors let out noisy whines.

"But it's having it that counts!" Belch disagreed.

Hiccup and I both moved outwards to meet them and to flex our wings. Mom and Dad let us through them, staying silent as we got through one reunion to the next.

Above us were our friends, either dragons or riding dragons. Hiccup let out a laugh, once he seemed to notice something funny. "Is there a reason why all of you are switched up?"

It took me a while to figure out what he meant but then I saw it. All of my friends, the ones that were hatched as dragons were currently in human form. While those that were born human were currently dragons. Fishlegs had Meatlug riding onto him. Snotlout had Firewrym, Barf, and Belch, on his back, while the twins meanwhile were on top of the separated Zippleback. Turning back, Astrid the Nadder had Stormfly mount on top of her.

I let out a laugh. This was very ironic.

Firewrym sighed. I took a small bit of pleasure in causing her some annoyance, maybe more than I should have. "Someone has to communicate things for themâ€¦ and I hate having to waste time letting them fumble about writing everything."

"Hey, you've gotten used to it ow!" Tuffnut earned a fist from the black-haired girl.

"Wellâ€¦ it is kind of true," said Meatlug. "There's a lot of dragons who need talk and we've had to spend alot of time translating..."

Fishlegs nodded. He leaned down and offered Hookfang a ride up. "We'veâ€¦ been busy."

"How busy?" I asked. "What's happened? What about the others?" Now that I think about it; we still had to worry about the rest of the "Flight" and then there was the fact that there were two more transformed friends I did not see.

"A whole week does things," said the Stormfly.

"Wish you slept through it more, uh nevermind," Snotlout muttered. He shut up as soon as Astrid gave him a glare.

"Well, the Flight got bigger, well, I don't think it's really a Flight anymore," Astrid spoke "As for the other two, they had some fights with their parents when they went home."

I winced. Yeah, Camicazi and Thuggory must not have had a reunion.

Hiccup frowned. "... I am so going to need to work on fixing that."

"How?" I asked. "How are we going to fix thisâ€¦" I fumbled for the words. "Role reversal?" I said. "I mean, some of us can change backâ€¦ others, not so much. You've gotta turn us back." I moved a paw up to the top of my scalp and tried to imagine pulling off my cloak, but nothing happenedâ€¦ because my cloak was no more. A few months ago, I would have wanted to be unable to become human ever againâ€¦ now I was trapped as a dragon like everyone else.

"... Maybe later," said Astrid, her voice gruff. "We only came back to check on you, but the other Kin need us." She then smiled and then slapped Hiccup with a lick.

Both of us had a second's pause to notice it had happened before she took off into the skies and shouted. "Good to have you back!"

We watched her fly off into the clouds, before looking down and - everyone else was gone.

We just exchanged looks for a moment, let it all sink in. A week, so much changed, lots of dragons. We spent a good while there, just thinking.

Hiccup sighed. "And here I was thinking I wouldn't have to be responsible for the entire village anymore!"

Dad steps forward, "Oh, what? You're going to be doing it eventually anyways. Might as well get a headstart!"

Mom came behind him, hefting the food basket Astrid left behind. "You forgot this, by the way." She licked us both and dropped it at our feet.

I nudged the basket open, finding some raw fish for us to eat. I took one mackerel with a little disappointment. "We are going to get used to this."

She and Dad left us to go somewhere, leaving us on our own.

Turning back, it slowly became clear just exactly where we were. Our grandfather's house looked so different now that I think about it; I could hardly recognize it after the floor had been rebuilt and the ceiling that had been redone since it kept leaking water it. Also helped I only bothered to step foot in there once or twice my whole life. I guess with our home destroyed, our parents picked this place since it was available.

After eating, we did didn't have much to do so we left, taking off for Berk.

We flew over the place where King fell to us. There was nothing but a burning out crater in the middle of the village, a place full of destroyed houses and shattered earth. Nothing remained of the tyrant... not even bones. Just ash. The funny part was, that wasn't what we paid the most attention to.

Things had changed while we were away. See, Berk has slowly been "getting" new dragons over the months since this whole adventure started, first those who were cursed into being dragons got stuck again. Then Astrid decided to get her own dragons. And now it seemed like they would overflow the village! A quick fly-over and we ended up finding a boatloads of them at every street well, what left of them anyways. A few were even helping the reconstruction, carrying things like overgrown oxen.

I have no idea how many dragon compared to people there were, but it was jaw dropping. It was almost seeing an idea I once had come to

life way back when I wasâ€| someone else.

Several of them turned to look up at us as we flew, all sorts of looks right at us. I wasn't sure what kind emotions they had towards us, but I could see an uneaseâ€| a fear maybe.

"... You know, I don't think I'll ever get used to people looking at me," said Hiccup.

"What's wrong? Everything's right!" Well, there were problems, but aside from the skeptical looks from some of the dragons below there wasn't much.

"That's how I felt about things last time." Hiccup said.

I glowered. He was too lost and thought, probably thinking about things that didn't matter right now. I and lightly bumped against his body. "Come on. Enjoy it! We earned it."

He sighed. I turned away. Was nothing going to please him h-

Without any warning, I was tackled from the side.

Hiccup darted before I could return the favor. I laughed at the thought of "getting" him, and promptly gave chase

As we went into a game of aerial tag, I thought to myself - We might have both been stuck as dragons, so we might as well enjoy it.

Things were peaceful in Berk, probably the most peace there had been in a long time. Even with all of the newcomers and with the recent unrest from the battle, I think the idea that the root cause for most of the dragon attacks gone, there was the lingering feeling of maybe things changingâ€| for the better. Aside from me and my brother causing some problems, there didn't seem like anything that could go wrong.

That's when we saw something going wrong... A fireball went up in the air. over the docks. Without a word, we flew that way.

Once we arrived, we saw that Gobber was arguing with a Boneknapperâ€| as well as several other dragons and men.

"No, you're not getting the fish!" Gobber said. One of the dragons, a Gronckle, nearby had to translate to group, relaying the message to the others. Maybe another former human.

"Yes we are! We worked!" another one of the dragons spoke. A small Terror had to relay the message to a Gronckle who wrote it down.

It seemed like a fight was brewing, one between my blacksmithing master and some transplanted commoners. I thought about just leaving them be, they didn't matter.

But Hiccup seemed to have other ideas and joined below. "What's the problem here?"

Sighing, I joined him a moment.

"Oh, hey boys!" Gobber said cheerily. "Justâ€¦work negotiations over here. "

As soon as I arrived, I saw the dragons turn to me and my brother with fearful looks. "Uhâ€¦ nothingâ€¦ We do not want to cause trouble," said one of them.

That bothered bothered me, enough to actually take an interest in this matter. I spoke. "Nothing? Really?"

"Noâ€¦ uh, please spare usâ€¦" pleaded another others.

I turned towards Hiccup. He was better at talking to people. He nodded and spoke, "Can you tell us what's the problem? We just want to know."

The dragons slowly backed away a steps at a time, but eventually they spoke after mustering a scrap of courage. "We just want our dues. We were told to work and we would get fish."

The Gronckle simply underlined some nearby text that said same thing, just to let Gobber know what topic we were on.

Hefting a barrel over his shoulder, Gobber replied. "Yeah, but this is mine! There's a food shortage all over!"

I groaned. This was getting worse. On the one hand, I wanted to support Gobber but at the same time, I was worried about seeming... tyrannical. "WHO told you about this?" I asked the other dragons.

"A Nadder told us! Said that we would be fed if we worked."

I raised an eyebrow. Was it Astrid? Or was it Stormfly? "What Nadder?"

"A Nadder!" said another.

"Well, I had a Gronckle tell me..." Said one.

"Well, I was told by a Nightmare..."

Fishlegs or Meatlug? Or maybe Hookfang? Definitely not Snotlout or Firewrym... I thought about it. Maybe our friends had them do some work around the village to earn a living? "Uhâ€¦ do you know their names?"

The dragons all gave each other questioning looks. "No. Isâ€¦ is that important?"

Hiccup just sighed. "They don't know the name ofâ€¦ whoever started this."

I nodded, I had to agree. Names were very practical and unfortunately, most dragons don't have one. After getting used to everyone having names, I just knew how flatout better it was to use them when communicating. "Or someone wanted to get them in troubleâ€¦" I sighed. "You got any ideas?" I asked my brother.

"One." He eyed Gobber. He touched the ground andâ€¦nothing happened.

"Ohâ€¦ right." He said. "Guess I'll have to do this the old fashioned way."

I raised an eyebrow as he wrote onto the ground manually. I guess he lostâ€¦ whatever power the King bestowed on him. 'GIVE THEM SOME. LET THEM EARN MORE LATER,' he wrote.

Gobble grimaced disapprovingly "Vikings before drago- Ow! Okay fine." He opened the barrel and offered some fish to the dragons.

I stuck my tongue out in disgust. I was not biting my teacher's pants again. "Now. Go ahead and eat," I told them.

The dragons took their rewards with timid satisfaction, bowing to me and my brother and then eating with a single gulp.

"And next time, remember to remember the names of everyone, Kin or Herd. It'll make things easier later," said Hiccup.

One of the smaller dragons raised a head. "Butâ€¦ but why? The Laws we lived under have always encouraged-"

"New rules," I said.

Several of the dragons seemed to flinch at that statement, afraid of me. Agh, having dragons scared of me was a dream that any young Viking or dragon would have wantedâ€¦ now I just saw it as a burden.

I groaned. "It'sâ€¦ easier this way. Makes remembering each other easier."

"Ohâ€¦ alright," said the Terror. "Uh, where do I get a name then? Before wellâ€¦" Before the King died, he bestowed names.

I shrugged. "Make your ownâ€¦" I turned to Hiccup. "Orâ€¦ have people you know name you."

My brother raised a paw. Waving it to me since he couldn't point. "Or complete strangers."

I laughed. Yeah. Those were where the best names came from.

The dragons all nodded, turned to each other, and left.

Gobber groan "Wellâ€¦ glad that's taken care of." He muttered something about how he shouldn't be giving fish to random dragons. "Next thing you know, I'll be harassed by a certain Boneknapperâ€¦"

"No one believes that story," Hiccup said.

Gobber seemed to know what he said, as if he knew for that split second what dragons spoke. "Hey! It's true I tell you!"

I shook my head. I didn't know what story it was they were talking about, but I bet Fishlegs and Meatlug would be the first to point out how impossible it wasâ€¦.

I shook my head. "Come on, let's just get out of here." I took wing

and flew.

Hiccup nodded and came up after me. "Right behind you."

As it turned out, a village that was recovering from a big battle had quite a lot of problems. Every now and again, we were forced to go down onto the ground and fix someone's problems. We've had to dealt with some young Nightmares bothering Gustav their babysitter, there was another food dispute over some dragons and property rights and livestock ,and even weirder marriage counseling. Yeah, a busy day.

Hours later once we settled down and the day was spent, we both decided to spend some time in the wreckage of our old home. In the battle against the King, it was reduced to rubble and burnt wood, along with a good chunk of the village.

"Dad said that our home stood for as long as he was wed;" Hiccup.
"Now it's gone."

I shuffled through the wreckage, wondering about memories I never had. "I think I found the door to the house."

"Really?" Hiccup said. "... Maybe our next home would be better suited for our bodies."

"Maybe" I said.

We sat in the ashes, wondering what would happen now.

Hiccup squinted at me, a question on his lips. "You remember what happened? How the fight played out?"

I shook my head. "Not really, no." I remember a bit of what happened, about how we decided to go be lunatics and face the King one last time. But the last last parts of the fight, that was...missing. I had a vague idea, about a struggle, about fires and maybe he swallowed us... but that all felt like a distant waking dream at this point. "I mean". How did I end up like this?"

"Oh" Hiccup frowned, turning his gaze to his forearms.

"Sorry," I shrugged. But well, I was glad the King was gone. I no longer had to live under his shadow and he couldn't threaten me any longer; we were free. "Just relax."

Hiccup turned to me, skeptical but he nodded. "I'm just wondering."

"And that's important how?" I said halfheartedly. "We've got a lot to think about already."

"Well, there's Wrath to think about, the weapon."

"Wrath" Oh. Gram. That sword that was useless until at the very end. "Where did it go?"

Hiccup shrugged. "It might have gotten lost through the struggle."

"Wellâ€¦ as long as no one use it against us, we should be fine."

"Maybe, but that than thatâ€¦ did you ever have these odd thoughts before you woke up?"

I frowned. What was he getting at? "We were dreaming, that's kindaâ€¦ normal for dreams."

"It's just, this was different," he said. "I can't explain itâ€¦ it wasn't _my_ dream."

I tried to recall the fading memories I had, back in that dream.. There was something back there, something desiring revenge against not just one person butâ€¦ many "creatures". "Thatâ€¦ wasn't you," I didn't ask him. Sometimes we ended up connecting through dreams. And that thought wasn't mine. "Soâ€¦ whose was it?"

There a was a still silence between us. So far, the only time those recollections ever appeared toâ€¦ show us, connect us were to our ancestors, those connected through us by blood or descent. But if that was the caseâ€¦ could it be thatâ€¦

Noâ€¦ that would have been silly. We could not have gone and had tasted some of the King's memories. He was a completely different dragon than a Night Fury. Enough that it wouldn't be called cannibalism if he swallowed us whole!

Iâ€¦ dug through the wreckage a bit more. I did not want to think about it.

"Uh, Toothless?" Hiccup asked.

"Justâ€¦ digging. Maybe we'll find something!" I urged, pushing aside burnt wood.

Hiccup stood behind me. I pushed aside another chunk of burned out cieling away and uncovered a familiar book.

"Hey, waitâ€¦ is that what I think it is?" Hiccup exclaimed.

I pushed more debris off and uncovered the rest of it. "It'sâ€¦ intact."

It was that familiar black scaled book again, made from Night Fury skin that caused all of this to happen. It seemed completely undamaged despite being in a burned out building. Magic might have protected it.

"What do we do with it?"

Hiccup took it under his paw. "... I got an idea."

End
file.